

The Return of the Condor Heroes

Jin Yong

Shen Diao Xia Lu (Divine Eagle, Gallant Knights)

by Jin Yong

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Chapter 1 - No Love under the Wind and Moon

Translated by Noodles



Within the boat were five girls picking lotuses ... a lonely heart like a string struggling to be untangled ... there are no lovers meeting under the wind and moon, the past is like a dream cut short

The fog has lightened due to the strong winds, but as time approaches, solitude lies by the stream. A mysterious song is heard from afar, seemingly from the Jiangnan province. A soft and graceful tune was played which carried across the lake's surface under the cover of the mist. Once the song had finished, a small boat appeared. Within the boat were five girls who were singing and laughing, picking lotuses into the boat. The lyrics the girls sang were from the poem *The Butterfly Loves the Flower*, written by the Song poet Ouyang Xiu, the words sung matched what the girl was feeling inside; though only sixty words were sung, the season, time of day, place, scenery and the girl's face, clothes, hair adornments, emotions were all described meticulously. The next part of the song is as if someone is narrating a scene, a love story, which is close at heart yet far away, but a love which isn't yet exhausted.

Ouyang Xiu was in Jiangnan as a court official where he lived a leisurely lifestyle, doing as he pleased, absorbed in what he was doing (reading, writing etc.,). People of Song shouldn't use their position to abuse the town's people, but it is not forbidden to use poetry for leisure. As long as a line of poetry came out, as long as there is well water to accompany a song, as the Jiangnan spring comes and the willow buds, as lotuses are on the autumn lake, everything that follows is an Ou poem.

It was during the year when Southern Song was established, and when the South Lake became popular. It was near mid autumn, as lotus leaves began to decay, and when lotus pods were at their best. A song spread across the lake to a Taoist priestess's ear. As she sat alone underneath a willow tree

quietly, the night winds forced her to place an apricot yellow robe on. The winds managed to brush a piece of dirt on her neck. She hid her feelings, as 'a lonely heart like a string struggling to be untangled'. The song gradually moves away, the song is a verse of Ouyang Xiu's Butterfly Loves a Flower. A light breeze carried two sentences; "there are no lovers meeting under the wind and moon, the past is like a dream cut short". The song comes to a rest. A smile came upon her lips.

She let out a sigh and raised a left hand revealing a bloody palm. "What do you find so funny?" she mumbled to herself. She sang to herself, without understanding the regret and sorrow within the poem.

Standing about one hundred feet away from the priestess, a plainly dressed bearded old man was standing silently unmoved but as he heard the two sentences he let out an extremely quiet sigh.

A little boat gently glides across the blue jade lake. The girls on the boat were young; three of them about fifteen or sixteen, the other two were around nine. Two of the girls were cousins. The older of the two was called Cheng Ying; the younger was called Lu Wushuang. The difference in age was about six months. The other three girls were singing songs constantly, the boat emerging from a pile of lotus leaves.

Cheng Ying said, "Cousin, can you guess who that old man is?" pointing to the man underneath the willow tree.

The hair on that man is all messed up, his beard loose, the colour of his beard was black like a crow's, indicating that he is not very old, although his face has traces of wrinkles like those of a seventy or eighty year old. He is wearing blue, around his neck is hung a bright satin bib. On it was embroidery of cat jumping at a butterfly, though the picture is now old and fading away.

Lu Wushuang said, "That strange man has sat there for half a day now, why doesn't he move?"

Cheng Ying said, "If you want to call him something, call him old grandpa. If you call him strange, surely he would get angry."

Lu Wushuang laughed, "Is he not strange? He's old yet he is still wearing a bib. If the bearded man gets up and becomes angry, that is surely something to be watched."

From within the boat a disheveled lotus was lifted up and is thrown towards the man. The boat is about ten feet from the man. Lu Wushuang is young but the strength in her arms is not feeble, the one stroke was very accurate.

Cheng Ying shouted out, "Cousin!"

It was meant to delay her but she saw the lotus was in front of her face and flew past.

As the man looked up, he saw the lotus flying towards him, but he didn't put his hand up to catch it and let it hit him in the face. He started to eat the petals from his face and clothes even though the petals were bitter, and smiled as the boat is rowed closer and eventually came ashore.

Cheng Ying ran towards the man and tugged his clothes saying, "Old grandpa, those are not nice to eat."

She reached into a pocket and pulled out a lotus flower, split it open, peeled off eighteen petals, then split open the blue green skin of the lotus and removed the bitter core, and then passed it onto the man's hand. The man put it into his mouth and started to chew, and felt an extremely sweet taste, completely different to what he had eaten before. He cracked a smile at Cheng Ying and nodded his head. Cheng Ying did this again and gave another lotus to the man. The man put it in his mouth and chewed for a while and then looked up at

the sky and said, "Follow me?" While he said this he was striding in a westerly direction.

Lu Wushuang grabbed hold of Cheng Ying's hand and said, "Cousin lets follow him."

The one of the other three girls spoke up and said, "Let's go home, if you go now, Lady will scold at us."

Lu Wushuang put on a naughty face after she saw the strange man had run away extremely quickly and said, "If you don't come, fine", then released her cousin's hand and chased after the man. Cheng Ying had come out to play with her cousin and couldn't leave her alone and so followed. The other three girls were older than them, but they didn't have the same courage and just called out a few times, as they watched the old man disappear into the mulberry forest followed by the two cousins.

The old man ran very fast, but saw that the two cousins couldn't keep up so stopped and waited. However, in the end he would not wait any longer and turned around towards them, grabbed the girls, put one underneath each of his armpits, and flew towards his destination. The two girls could only hear the sound of the wind in their ear, the stones and grass on the ground flew past their eyes. Lu Wushuang became frightened and shouted, "Let me go! Let me go!" The strange man ignored her, and instead moved even quicker. Lu Wushuang looked up, and bit fiercely on the man's hand. Teeth marks were left on the man's palm but he hid the pain. Lu Wushuang loosened her teeth. She shouted and screamed with all her life. Cheng Ying stayed quiet.

The old man hurried for a while and then put the two girls down onto the ground. They had arrived at a cemetery. Cheng Ying's face was pale white, while Lu Wushuang's face was swollen and red. Cheng Ying said, "Old grandpa, we need to go home, we don't want to play anymore!"

The strange man stared at her without flinching. Cheng Ying saw that his eyes revealed a sorrow, a lonely aura, and filled her with pity. She gently said, "If you've got no one to play with; then wait by the lake again tomorrow and I'll peel lotus for you to eat again."

The strange man sighed and said, "Yes, it has been ten years, I've had no one for company within these last ten years." His eyes were still exuding an ominous light. He then fiercely said, "Where's Yuanjun? Where do you live?"

Cheng Ying heard his serious voice, and became frightened. Quietly she said, "I, I? I don't know."

The man grabbed her arm, shook her a few times. His voice sunk, "Where's Yuanjun?" Cheng Ying was scared and wanted to cry, tears rolled from her eyes. Yet she didn't cry.

The old man clenched his teeth. "Cry, cry. You won't cry? Hmm, you were like this ten years ago. I won't let you marry him. You said you couldn't bear to leave me, so why did you leave with him. You said you were touched by my kindness, leaving me would leave you heartbroken. Ha! Those are all deceiving words! If you are really hurt, why don't you cry?"

He held onto Cheng Ying fiercely. Cheng Ying had been pale due to fright but still the tears wouldn't come. The man shook her again. Cheng Ying clenched her teeth and said to herself "I won't cry, I won't cry!"

The strange man said, "You won't even cry one tear for me, not even one. What use is my life now?" He suddenly let go of Cheng Ying, bent his legs, crouched, and thrust himself into a tombstone causing a crashing sound. He lay on the ground unconscious.

Lu Wushuang said, "Cousin, quickly escape" and grabbed hold of Cheng Ying's hand, turned and ran. Cheng Ying

hurried a few steps, but as she saw the strange man lying with blood on his head, her heart couldn't stand it and said, "Old grandpa is dead". Lu Wushuang said, "Now he's dead, won't he turn into a ghost?"

Cheng Ying gulped, scared that he would turn into a ghost, scared that he would suddenly wake up, and remembered the mad words he was saying. She saw his head covered in blood and felt pity, she comforted herself, by saying, "Old grandpa is not a ghost, I'm not scared, he won't blame me". She slowly walked towards the old man. "Grandpa, are you hurt?"

The man let out a groan. Cheng Ying got a bit braver, and tended to his wounds with a handkerchief. But the force of the collision was great, so the wound on his head was very severe. The handkerchief was soaked in blood. She used her left hand to press hard on the wound and after a while the bleeding stopped. The man began to open his eyes, and saw Cheng Ying by his side. "Why did you save me? Why don't you let me die?" As Cheng Ying saw he had awakened, her spirits raised and said softly "Does your head hurt?" The strange man shook his head. "My head doesn't hurt, my heart hurts." Cheng Ying thought this was strange thinking, "There is a large wound on his head, yet while his head doesn't hurt, his heart does." She thought no more of this as she untied her waistband and gave it to the man to tie his wound.

The man took a breath and sat up. "You agreed not to see me ever again; we are going to part now. You won't shed a single tear for me?"

Cheng Ying heard his words were full of sorrow; saw his head full of blood, eyes earnest, and couldn't help but be filled with sorrow and two drops of tears emerged. As the man saw the tears, his face changed to a more joyful expression, but

at the same time a mournful sound came out. Cheng Ying saw his sobs, her own tears like drops of pearls, rolled down her cheeks, then reached out and hugged his neck. Lu Wushuang saw how these two strangers are sobbing together, and wanted to laugh. She couldn't hold it in any longer and burst out in a laugh.

The strange man heard this, and said to the sky, "The words that came out of your mouth said you won't leave me, but as you grow older you will forget the things you've said; just remember the little white face. You laugh with real joy!" He looked down at Cheng Ying. "Yes, yes, you are Yuan, my little Yuan. I won't let you leave, I won't let you leave with the little white face", as he held tightly onto Cheng Ying. Lu Wushuang saw he had become deeply disturbed and didn't dare to laugh again.

"Yuan, I've finally found you. Let's go home, from now on you will follow father." Cheng Ying said, "Old grandpa, my father died a long time ago." The strange man said, "I know, I know. I'm your stepfather, you don't recognize me?" Ying shook her head. "I don't have a stepfather."

The strange man gave a howl, and pushed Ying away. "Yuan, you don't even recognize step father?" Ying said, "Old grandpa, my name is Cheng Ying, not your Yuan."

"You're not Ah Yuan? You are not Ah Yuan?" he was expressionless for half an hour. "Hmm, around twenty years ago Ah Yuan was your age. Now Yuan has grown up and doesn't need father anymore. The only thing in your heart is Lu Zhanyuan, that swine."

Wushuang sighed knowingly; "Lu Zhanyuan?"

The man asked, "You know him, don't you?? She shook her head smiling, "I just recognized that man is my uncle." The man's complexion changed to a vengeful colour. He grabbed

hold of Wushuang and asked, "Where is that swine? Lead me to him."

Though Wushuang is scared inside, she put on a smile and said, "My uncle lives close by. You really want to find him?"

"Yes, yes. I've been searching for him for three days, so I could settle my debt with that swine. Little girl lead me to him and old grandpa won't trouble you." As he said this, his voice changed tone from angry to gentle and released his grasp. She used her right hand to touch her sore left arm.

"You really hurt me. I don't know where he lives anymore." The man's eyebrows rose, as if he was about to go mad again, but thought it is not right to force the little girl, and put on a clown like smile. He put his hand in his sleeve and said, "It was grandpa's fault. You don't have to follow me. Grandpa has some sweets for you." He reached around his sleeve but couldn't find any sweets. Wushuang smiled and clapped.

"You don't have any sweets, aren't you ashamed to lie? Alright, my uncle lives near here." She pointed to two faraway giant trees. "It's near there."

The man reached out his long arm and carried the girls underneath his armpits again, and hurriedly flew towards the two trees. He followed the path in front, until there is a small obstruction but cleared it in a leap. In a flash, the three of them were by the two trees. The strange man dropped the two girls, and saw two grand tombs below the trees. On the tombstone was written: "Here lies the grave of Lu Zhanyuan." On another was written "Here lies the wife of Lu." The grass around the path to the tombs was knee deep, indicating that the tombs had been here a long time.

The man just stared at the tombstone and said, "Lu Zhanyuan is dead... how long ago?" Wushuang laughed as

she replied, "Three years ago."

"He deserved to die, good. What a pity that he didn't die beneath my hands!" he said as he laughed at the sky. The laugh could be heard from faraway, but the laugh was a regretful, a lamenting laugh, not one of joy.

It was deep within the night, the field of grass covered by fog. Wushuang tugged at her cousin's sleeve. "Let's go now." The strange man said, "The little white face is dead. Ah Yuan, where can you go now? I'll take you back to Dali. Hey little girl, take me to your dead uncle's wife."

Wushuang pointed to the tombstone, "Can't you see? My aunt also died." The man picked himself up and his voice like thunder, shouted, "Are those words real or a lie? She... she really is dead?" Wushuang's face turned pale, and in a quivering voice said "Father said not long after uncle died, my aunt followed. I don't know anymore, I don't know. Don't shout at me, I'm scared!"

The man beat his chest and shouted, "She's dead... she's dead? No, you can't die before seeing me again. I followed your instructions; ten years later, we'll meet again. You didn't wait for me?" He shouted wildly and jumped around madly, his cries like a wild tiger. He swept his leg across the right tree, which shook the branches of the tree. Lu Wushuang and Cheng Ying held each other tightly and retreated a few steps not daring to be closer. The man suddenly grabbed hold of one of the trees, and shook it violently, and tried to pull it out. The tree is around a thousand pounds so how could he pick it up? "You promised, but now you break it? You said we would meet again. Does the promise not count?" After a shout, the noise became quieter. He crouched down, and moved his chi through his two arms, his head gradually heated up and steam arose, the muscles in his arm clenched, and his back straightened. He shouted "Rise!" As the tree

was being pulled, a strange noise occurred. Amidst the noise, there were now two pieces of the tree. He picked up one part of the tree and stood still before saying quietly, "Die! Die!" He exerted some strength and flung the piece of tree away far away. Like the handle of an umbrella it was flying through the air. He stood in front of the tomb and mumbled, "You are right, the wife of Lu is indeed Ah Yuan." His eye blurred, the two tombs had become the image of two people. One of them a smiling young girl with the pupils in the eyes full of hope; the other is well dressed, collected young man. The couple was sitting together.

The strange man opened his eyes and said, "You seduced my daughter, I'll kill you with my finger." He stretched out his right hand and finger (the shi finger), stood up straight, blocking the path of the young man. A severe pain went through his shi finger and he released the pain. It hit the tombstone. However the image of the young man remained. The strange man shouted: "Where can you escape to now?" He struck out twice with his left palm, making two sounds, aimed at the same tombstone. He kept on hitting out, with each palm getting more severe each time. After ten palms, blood began to seep through. Cheng Ying could no longer hold back and shouted, "Old grandpa, stop fighting, you are going to hurt yourself."

He laughed and shouted back, "I'm not hurt, I'm going to kill the swine Lu Zhanyuan." He then laughed heartily, stopped and then said: "I must see your face, I must." With ferocious strength in his two hands he plunged ten fingers into the ground of Mrs. Lu's tomb. He pulled back with two arms, and two lumps of the ground came with him. His two palms like an iron spade, he dug lump after lump out of the ground.

The two cousin's faces had become colourless, and they had the chance to escape. While the man was busy digging, they could leave unnoticed. The two girls hurried around a few

bends, and as they saw the man didn't follow, they relaxed a bit. The two girls were unfamiliar with the place, so they looked for locals to help them along the road. They walked deep into the night when they eventually found their way back to the Lu house.

Wushuang shouted, "Something terrible is happening, something bad! A madman is digging up the graves of uncle and aunt!" She ran into the hall, only to see her father Lu Liding raise his head and stare at the wall. Ying followed into the hall, and their eyes followed Lu Liding's, and saw three sets of palm prints, two at the top, two in the middle, below five, in total there were nine. Each one was printed with blood. Lu Liding saw his daughter and asked, "What are you talking about?"

"There is a madman digging up the graves of uncle and aunt," said Wushuang. Her father stood up: "Nonsense!"

"Uncle, it's true!" Cheng Ying replied. Lu Liding knew what her daughter was like, mischievous and naughty but Cheng Ying never tells lies. "What has happened?"

Wushuang told her father what happened. Her father was troubled, and before she finished, had picked up a blade and hurriedly headed for the graves. When he got there, not only did he see the graves had been disturbed, but the coffins had been opened. When he heard that someone was digging up the graves, he had known what to expect, but when he saw it with his own eyes, his heart skipped a beat. There was no sign of the bodies, the ash in the coffins, paper money, cotton cushions were all in a mess. It must be a god, and then saw on the lids of the coffins were traces of what looks like an iron tool. He looked in despair at the state of the graves. He didn't ask his daughter who did this, but wondered who could have such debts with his brother and

sister-in-law that even after their deaths, their graves and corpses wouldn't be left alone. He held tightly to his knife.

He knew his brother had taught the martial arts. He was a careful, generous, dependable man, who didn't dabble in Jianghu affairs. He was a learned man. After he circled the area, and couldn't find any traces of the suspect, he waited for half an hour before finally returning to his home.

He approached the main hall. He sat down on a chair and placed his knife by his side, and stared at the nine blood prints on the wall. He thought, "Before brother died, he said he had an enemy, a Taoist priestess, named Li Mochou, with the nickname 'Scarlet Serpent Deity', whose kung fu was extremely high. She was cruel and vindictive person. He anticipated that after ten years of marriage, she would come and seek revenge on the couple. At the time Lu had said: 'My illness is not getting better; I guess the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' cannot take her revenge. In three years, it will be the time. You must persuade my wife to go into hiding.'" I had promised him, but who could have guessed that on the night he had passed away, sister-in-law would cut her throat? Brother had passed away three years ago, and the time approaches. The couple had passed away so why does she still come? Brother also said that before the priestess kills, she would place bloody handprints on the wall on the target's home, with one print meaning one life. My home only has seven people in total so why nine prints? The two prints are for my brother and sister-in-law, but now they are dead she must have dispatched people to ravage their grave. I've been at home all day, so how did that evil witch manage to place the prints? Could she get in here without disturbing even gods and ghosts? He shivered.

Soft footsteps can be heard behind him, a small soft pair of hands covered his eyes. He recognized it was his daughter's voice when she spoke. "Father, who am I?"

Lu Wushuang had always been close to her father. When she was three years old, she played this game with him. This made her parents laugh. He was sad, so now his daughter is trying to cheer him up. Under normal circumstances this would have worked. But today it would be no use as he pulled his daughter's hands away. "Father has no time to play, let's go inside and play!"

Lu Wushuang stood there. She always had the love of her father and now he had no time for her. She let out a sigh and wanted to share in her father's misery only to see the male servant Ah Gen hastily arriving.

"There's a guest outside master."

"You tell them I'm not at home."

"Master, she doesn't want to see you. She just wants to spend the night here."

Lu Liding said, "Who? Are they women?"

"No, it's a mother with two small boys. They've been waiting a long time."

When Lu Liding heard it was a mother with her two sons, he was able to relax a bit. "It's not a Taoist priestess?"

Ah Gen shook his head, "No. It's a plainly dressed woman, she looks like a mother of a respectable family."

"Alright, take them to the guest room and treat them well. Give them something to eat." Ah Gen hurriedly went out. Lu Wushuang said, "I'm going as well" as she hastily exited. Lu Liding stood up, he wanted to go inside to discuss how to face this enemy with his wife. He made his way into the hall. He showed her the prints, and told her about the missing corpses. Mistress Lu pondered and said, "We are going to have to hide the two girls?"

Master Lu pointed at the wall. "The girls are inside, but I fear that the monster that did this won't let them escape so easily. We have practiced kung fu for several years now, when the person enters our home; remember not to show any emotion."

Mistress Lu stared at the wall, "There are nine prints? We only have seven people within the household." As soon as Lu Liding heard this, his limbs went numb and looked at his wife startled, and cried. He reached out and held her arms.

"Dear, when the time comes, there is no need to be afraid. The top two palm prints are for Brother and his wife, the middle two are ours. In the last group, two are Ying and Wushuang, there are three are for Ah Gen and our two maids. Blood will fill this house tonight."

Mistress Lu quivered and said, "Brother and sister-in-law?"

"I don't know what deep debt the witch is after, but brother and his wife are dead. She has sent people to dig up the grave and disturb the corpses."

"You are saying that madman was sent by her?"

"Correct."

Mistress Lu saw that her husband's head was covered with sweat. "Why don't you go into your room, clean yourself up, and rest a while before we discuss this again."

Lu and his wife went into their room. "Wife, today it will be hard for the Lu family to avoid death, but if we survive we will honour Brother and sister-in-law's name." "You are correct," replied mistress Lu.

The two of them thought, Lu Liding is not a famous name, but the name Lu Zhanyuan is. The He Yuanjun couple was famous throughout the Jianghu world. The Lu name was

famous and no one in the Jianghu dared make fun of the name.

The two of them went to the back garden after they heard a sudden sound from the east wall. Near the top of the wall was a person. Lu stepped in front to shield his wife. He looked up and saw a young boy sitting on the wall, trying to pick a ling flower. By his leg, someone shouted out, "Careful, don't fall." It was Cheng Ying, Lu Wushuang and a boy picking flowers by the wall.

Lu thought, "The girls are naughty, getting someone else to do their errands."

The boy on the wall managed to pick a flower. Wushuang shouted, "Give it to me-give it to me!" The boy smiled, and threw it to Cheng Ying. Cheng Ying caught it and gave it to her cousin. Lu Wushuang was angry, and threw the flower onto the ground. She took a few steps, and angrily shouted, "Who cares? I don't want it anymore."

Lu and his wife saw how the kids were playing and arguing, and sighed. They withdrew to their room. Cheng Ying saw Wushuang crush the flower and asked, "Cousin, why are you angry?"

"I don't want his. I'll pick one myself." As she said this, she moved her right foot a little, and leapt. She hung onto a purple cane hanging from the tree. She used her strength and managed to leap up higher a few times, and landed on a silver branch of the Cinnamomum cassia tree (one of the group of aromatic trees like camphor and cinnamon) The boy on the wall clapped. "So you are joining me!"

Wushuang swung on the branch a few times and released her grip, throwing herself towards the wall. Although she has learned a little lightness kung fu, this leap was very dangerous. But since she was angry with the boy giving the

flower to Ying and not her, she wanted to keep her pride in front of the boy. She wasn't used to jumping such a distance. The boy gulped and said, "Stretch your hand out" as he reached out. If the boy hadn't reached out, Wushuang would have made it, but when she saw his hand in midair she shouted, "Move!" and leaned to the side to avoid his hands. The ability to twist in the air is part of a higher level of kung fu; she had seen her dad perform this once before, but without the supervision of her parents how could she try it? As she turned, her hand wasn't able to reach the top of the wall. She shouted, "Oh no!" before falling to the ground. Another boy near the foot of the wall reached out to catch her. The wall was about ten feet tall. Though Wushuang was light, the force of her hitting the ground would still be high. The boy managed to grab her waist, the both of them falling onto the ground. Only to hear two "ka ka" noises, as the bone in Lu Wushuang's left leg snapped. The boy changed colour to that of the flowers on the stone altar, as blood spouted out. Cheng Ying wanted to help the boy who tried stopping the disaster up. The boy got up, and pressed hard on the heavy wound. Wushuang had already fainted. Cheng Ying picked up her cousin and shouted, "Uncle, aunt, hurry!"

The couple rushed out of their rooms to see to injured children, as well as a middle-aged woman who also rushed out from her room. It was the woman who had come to ask for shelter for the night. They saw her pick up the injured children and rush into the hall. Ignoring her own child's injuries, she tended to Lu Wushuang's leg, intending to put the snapped bone back in place. Mistress Lu fetched a piece of cloth and tied it around the boy's head before going to see her daughter. The woman then pressed down on the "bai hai" (white sea) pressure point and the "wei zhong" (middle gathering) pressure point on Lu Wushuang's leg to ease the pain, as she place one hand each on the broken pieces of bone, then put the bone into place. Lu Liding saw her

movements were swift, her pressure point "dim yue" kung fu was at a respectable level, and his curiosity was raised. "Who are you? Why did you come here?" The woman was busy tending to Wushuang's leg and didn't reply to the questions.

At the same time, a laugh was heard on the roof. "I'm here to take the nine lives of the Lu family, come out."

The woman heard the chilling laugh from the rooftop, swallowed, and continued to tend to Wushuang's injuries. As she twisted her hands, Wushuang let out a scream in sheer pain and she fainted again.

Everyone went outside, only to see a young priestess standing by the overhang of the roof, the moonlight lit up her face. She was about fifteen or sixteen years of age, and a long sword with a blood red sash hung on her back, the sash moving in the wind.

Lu Liding said calmly, "I'm Lu Liding. Are you under the command of priestess Li?"

The priestess's lips were skewed when she replied, "It's good that you know. Go collect your wife and daughter, kill them and then kill yourself to spare me the trouble."

The words were said with coldness, at a speed neither too slow nor fast, and with disregard for the audience. When Lu Liding heard these words, his body quivered. "You...you" He wanted to jump on to the roof and fight the girl, but she was young and was just a girl, how could he fight her? As he hesitated, suddenly something swept passed his body; it was the woman who had come to ask for shelter, in her hand was a long sword, ready to fight that young priestess.

The woman wore a grey traditional dress, the priestess an apricot yellow robe. Under the moonlight, the images of grey and yellow resembled some sort of flying dance; three

flashes of light were produced as three sword-clashing sounds were made. Lu Liding's skills were taught by his brother, and though he has never fought an enemy before, his eyes weren't poor, and saw every stance of the two fighters. He saw the sword held in the priestess's hand turned from defense into attack, attack into defense, her sword stances were without mercy. The woman's sword matched hers. The sounds of clashing blades were heard, both swords turned over, suddenly the little priestess's sword flew into midair. The little priestess chased after her sword, her face losing its calmness and she shouted out, "I'm under the orders of my master to take the lives of the Lu family. Who are you, and why are you meddling in these affairs?"

The woman gave out a cold laugh and said, "It seems like your master has great ability, she went out to find Lu Zhanyuan to settle her debts, but she knew that he was dead, so she's taking out her anger on his loved ones, isn't that correct?"

The little priestess wielded three small silver needles with her right hand and threw them ferociously, two at the woman, one at Lu Liding who was standing in the middle of the courtyard. It was such an unexpected movement. As the woman fended off two needles with her sword, Lu Liding managed to catch the other needle with two fingers. The little priestess laughed out coldly and jumped down from the building, and quickly flew away hearing the chasing footsteps.

The woman jumped down to the courtyard, and saw Lu Liding was still holding the silver needles. She shouted, "Drop it!" Lu Liding hesitated before doing so. She cut off a piece of her belt and wrapped it firmly around the wound on his right hand.

Lu Liding jumped. "The needles have poison on them?"

The woman replied, "Nothing can compare to this poison." She gave him a granule of medicine to take. Lu Liding felt his arms swelling and numbing. The woman used her sword tip to cut deeply into the two infected fingers of Lu, and saw drops of black blood seeping out.

Lu Liding jumped and thought to himself, "My finger wasn't cut, I only touched the silver needles and the effects are so severe. If the needles actually cut me then my life would surely have been gone." He then looked in the direction of the woman and said, "I have eyes but I fail to see TiaShan Mountain*, please, can madam tell me her name?" (*This phrase basically means he didn't see his benefactors even though they were in front of him.)

The woman replied, "My husband is named Wu, Wu Santong." Lu got up in awe and said, "So it is Madam Wu. I've heard the Wu's are under the order of Reverend Yideng in the south in Dali, is that right?"

"You are right. Reverend Yideng is indeed my husband's teacher. I have learned a little in terms of martial arts from my husband, who is nothing more than a farmer. I hope master Lu won't laugh."

Lu thanked her for the helping hand. He had heard from his brother, out of all the martial artists he had seen, those under the teachings of Reverend Yideng were the best. After Yideng had abdicated as the ruler of Dali, he became a monk and had four students, "Fisherman, Woodsman, Farmer and Scholar". The farmer was called Wu Santong. Wu disliked his brother, but at the time his brother had not told him how the feud between them started. Why did Madam Wu not treat them as enemies but instead help them by fighting off the Scarlet Serpent Deity's disciple? The reasons are hard to fathom.

Everyone went back to the main hall. Lu Liding carried his daughter inside, and saw she had regained her consciousness, her face now white. She's holding in the pain and refraining from crying, not particularly aware.

Madam Wu said, "Now that witch's disciple had escaped, she herself will come here. Master Lu, I'm not looking down on you but even if you and your wife joined forces with me, we are never going to be able to compete with her. But even if we run it will be no use. We might as well wait for her and let fate decide."

Mistress Lu then asked, "Who exactly is the witch waiting for? And what feud has our family with her?" Madam Wu looked Lu Liding in the eye and said, "Master Lu never mentioned this before?"

Mistress Lu replied, "He only mentioned that it was something to do with brother and sister-in-law, something to do with love affairs, he isn't exactly sure himself."

Madam Wu sighed, "It must be something to do with that. I'm an outsider so it is not my place to speak. Master Lu's brother went to Dali ten years ago. Li Mochou, the Scarlet Serpent Deity is now infamous throughout the Jianghu world, but ten years ago she was a gentle beauty, and wasn't yet a priestess. This was before she sinned, after she saw your brother and fell under the enchantment of love. After many twists and turns, your brother eventually married Ah Yuanjun. However this wasn't any fault of Yuanjun. This kind of business is best kept under wraps; it's just today's events have forced me to retell these events. Yuanjun was my stepdaughter."

The Lu couple simultaneously gave out an understanding sigh. Madam Wu touched her injured son's shoulder in comfort. She stared into the flame of a candle and carried on.

"Your sister-in-law He Yuanjun was an orphan. We took her in and she became our stepdaughter. We loved her dearly. Eventually she met your brother, and they fell in love with each other, and wanted to get married. Firstly, my husband didn't want her to leave the family; secondly, he was too strict saying Jiangnan people were crafty and cunning; they can't be relied upon and forbade the wedding. Ah Yuan secretly ran away with your brother. On the wedding day, both my husband and Li Mochou went to find the couple and cause them trouble. Luckily, a high monk from the Dali Sky Dragon temple passed by and took the matter in his own hands. He requested, on his behalf, that they would grant the couple ten years of peace. Li Mochou and my husband agreed to this. My husband was angry, and after this event he became confused and disturbed; his teacher, fellow students and even I were unable to persuade him, or understand him. He just counted down the ten-year deadline. According to my calculations, today ten years exactly has passed. It was hard to predict that the couple would not enjoy the ten years of bliss that they had been granted." She dropped her head after she finished, her whole face changed to a mournful look.

Lu Liding said, "So according to what you have said, the person who dug up brother and sister-in-law's grave was your husband."

Madam Wu replied in shame, "After hearing what the two misses have said, it is indeed my husband."

Lu shaking his head said, "Your husband's actions are not trivial. There wasn't a feud in the first place. Even if there was, now that my brother and sister are dead, things should be bygones. But now he's stolen the corpses, is that the action of a hero?"

When it comes to status, the Wu couple is higher than that of Lu's. But now that his heart is full of fury, his words did not carry the proper tone of respect.

Madam Wu sighed, "Master Lu is right to blame my husband. He is confused and has stopped talking; he doesn't deserve any pity. I've brought my two children along here, to try and stop the wrong doings of my husband. Right now, I'm the only person who he takes any notice of." She looked at her two children and said, "Go and kowtow (kneel down) in front of Master and Mistress Lu to apologize for your father." The boys did as they were told.

Mistress Lu gave a hand to help the boys up and asked what their names were. The one who threw himself down and cut his forehead was called Wu Dunru, the older brother; the younger was called Wu Xiuwen. The difference in age was one year, one of them twelve, the other eleven. The two had been taught martial arts and were relatively learned. Madam Wu and her husband were getting old, and hoped that they could reach a good level of kung fu and schooling, so they could withhold the Wu name in Wuxia, and not just rely on it.

Madam Wu did not divulge the darker reason for her husband's behavior. She sighed and thought, "Those lies are only good for now. I mustn't tell anyone about the truth." In reality, when Yuanjun had grown to eighteen or nineteen she had become a beautiful woman. The feelings that Wu Santong had for her did not limit itself to the father daughter relationship. He was considered a hero in the Jianghu world so he could do nothing and he was relatively content. But when he saw that she had fallen in love with a Jiangnan youngster, he was angry that it wasn't him. That's why he said Jiangnan people are untrustworthy and unreliable, to get rid of his love rival. The reason he said this was that he had suffered the craftiness of Huang Rong. She tricked him into replacing Guo Jing in pushing down an ox and large stone,

and couldn't escape afterward. Although this matter was cleared up later, the words "Jiangnan people are untrustworthy" were etched into his head.

Madam Wu then said, "To think that before my husband had arrived, Li Mochou is already here seeking revenge." As she said this, a voice was heard from the roof.

"Ru'er, Wen'er, come with me!"

The words were unexpected, as no footsteps had been heard on the rooftop, yet someone was up there calling. The Lu couple gulped as they realized it was Wu Santong. Cheng Ying and Wushuang also recognized it was the weird lotus eating man. They saw a blur, as Wu Santong flew down and grabbed his sons, one in each hand before returning to the roof. Madam Wu shouted, "Hey, why don't you come and see master and mistress Lu, and return the corpses that you took from them? Hurry." Wu Santong did not reply as he had already long gone.

He ran wildly for a while, and hurriedly entered a forest. He put down Xiuwen but still held on to Dunru, as his trace disappeared and his son was left alone in the forest. As Xiuwen saw that his father had gone over hundred feet away, he shouted, "Father, father!" He heard a voice far away.

"Wait there. I'll come back for you." Wu Xiuwen knew his father was always acting strange, and doesn't plan anything. Although he was frightened alone in the black forest, he thought his father won't be long and sat down on a log. After a long while, his father still hadn't come. He said to himself, "I'll go and find mother!" as he headed back to the Lu home.

Jiangnan is a place where roads lead in all directions, where paths are twisty and windy; it is hard to travel by day so what about traveling at night? As he ran, the paths got narrower, and on numerous times he stepped into the middle of muddy

fields. Eventually he came across a forest, and realized he had gone in circles. He wanted to cry, and shouted, "Father, father! Mother... mother!" Who would hear him in the middle of the night? He heard a few noises, and recognized it was the call of a falcon. He once heard that falcons love to count the brows on people and if they counted clearly, it would be an ominous sign for the person. Immediately he spat out some saliva to wet his fingers, and then moistened his brow, so that it would be difficult for the falcon to count. But the falcon did not stop calling, He hid behind the trunk of a tree, keeping his brows covered with his finger, his heart jumping, not daring to move. After a while he closed his eyes and fell asleep.

In the morning, in a sleepy haze, he heard few clear screeches. He opened his eyes and looked above, and saw two extremely big white eagles hovering, wings spread out, looking magnificent. He had never seen this type of eagle before, his interest was raised and shouted, "Brother, come look at the big eagle," not realizing he was alone, as he was always by his brother's side.

Suddenly he heard two whistles behind him; the sound was gentle and soft, coming from the mouth of a little girl. The two eagles circled twice before descending. Wu Xiuwen turned around and saw a young girl, who was raising her arm to the sky. The eagles came down by her side. The girl gave one look to Wu Xiuwen and then stroked her two eagles saying, "Good eagle...clever eagle." Wu Xiuwen thought, "So the two eagles are her eagles. He looked at the eagles, which were exuding an air of superiority, standing taller than the girl. He walked up to the girl and asked, "Are those eagles yours?"

The girl pouted, and her face changed color. "I don't recognize you. I'm not going to play with you."

Wu Xiuwen touched the backs of the eagles without any intentions. The girl whistled, and the eagles raised their left wing. There was a high force behind the wings, and Xiuwen didn't guard against it; he ended up on the ground. He rolled around on the ground, eyes fixed on the eagles, and said admiringly, "Those eagles are great and they really listen to you. I'll get father to catch me one so I can train it."

"Huh, you think your father can catch one?"

Wu Xiuwen was just curious, but each time she caused embarrassment. He looked at her closely; she was wearing an elegant green dress, a pearl necklace hung around her neck, her face was white, almost like butter, her eyes moving and face delicate. Wu Xiuwen thought she was extremely beautiful, and wanted to approach her but saw she was cold, and stayed back in fear. The girl stroked the eagles back with her right hand, and examined Wu Xiuwen. "What's your name? Why are you alone?"

"My name is Wu Xiuwen. I'm waiting here for my father. What about you, what's your name?"

"I don't play with naughty boys," said the girl as she turned her back and walked away.

Xiuwen stood there before saying, "I'm not a naughty boy", and trying to chase the girl at the same time. He saw that the girl was younger than him by two, three years; her steps aren't very large and he should catch up with her very soon. Though he used his lightness kung fu, the girl's steps were very fast, and in a flash a distance of ten feet was between them. The girl hurried a few steps and then shouted back, "Hey, can you catch me?" "Of course", replied Xiuwen and immediately stepped up his efforts. The girl turned and ran, and then hid behind a tree. Wu Xiuwen followed. As soon as he was near, she suddenly stretched out her left foot, and tripped him up. He didn't anticipate this and fell forward. He

wanted to use the "Iron Tree Stump Stance" but the girl stuck out her right foot and kicked him fiercely in the behind. Wu Xiuwen fell down, his nose hitting a stone as he fell, causing a nose bleed and blood poured over his clothes. When she saw the blood, she stopped, and wanted to run away and leave the boy there. Suddenly, a voice from behind said, "Fu'er, you are bullying again, aren't you?"

"Who says? He just tripped by himself, what does it have to do with me? Don't listen to what father says." she replied without turning back. Wu Xiuwen stood up and held his nose. Although it didn't really hurt, the blood made him nervous. As he heard the voice talking to the girl, he turned around and saw an old man holding a metal walking staff. The hair on the man's temple was like frost, his appearance was strange, his eyes were white, he was a blind man. He heard the man laugh and say, "Just because I'm blind doesn't mean you can lie to me, I can hear everything. You act terribly now, so what's going to happen when you get older?"

She walked over to the man and held his hand, and gently said, "Grandpa, don't listen to what father says, okay. He tripped and he's got a nose bleed. Can you stop the bleeding?"

The old man walked forward and grabbed Wu Xiuwen's arm, then stretched out his right hand and used his finger to press on the "Wen Xiang Xue" (Smell Fragrant) pressure point by the nose. Wu Xiuwen's nosebleed was beginning to slowly stop, and as he touched his nose a few times, it did. He felt the man's fingers were like iron pliers, long and stiff, holding his arm tightly. He was scared, and didn't move; as soon as his hand was released, he used the grabbing hand kung fu taught by his mother, he pushed out a palm in a semi circle to repel the man. The old man wasn't anticipating this kid would strike out, and was hit by a sweetly timed palm. The man didn't react and gave out an approving sigh, while

holding to his wrist. Wu Xiuwen tried to distribute his chi in case he can't escape and has to fight.

The old man said, "Little fella, don't be scared. What's your name?"

"My name is Wu."

"Your accent is not local. Where are you from? Where are your parents?" As the man said this he released his wrist. When he mentioned parents, Wu Xiuwen remembered that he has been away from his parents for a night and didn't know how they were. He wanted to cry. When the girl saw his expression she sang, "Ashamed dog, eyes are red, ready to cry!"

Wu angrily replied, "I'm not going to cry again!"

The family was waiting at the Lu home for the enemy, when his father came and took him and his brother away; he spent a night alone in the forest. He was getting aggravated, his words were jumbled but the old man managed to make out seventy or eighty percent of it. They were from Dali, his father's name is Wu Santong; his most refined kung fu was the "Solitary Yang Finger".

"Your father is a disciple of Reverend Yideng, correct?"

"Yes, you know our emperor? You've seen him? I've never seen him," said Wu Xiuwen.

Wu Santong was the head of the Imperial Wood Transport, when the Emperor was Duan Zhi. The emperor became a monk, with the new name "Yideng". But Wu Santong couldn't let the past go and still called him Emperor. That's why his sons also refer to him as Emperor.

"I haven't yet had the luck to meet the legendary "Southern Emperor". This girl's parents were the receivers of great

kindness from him. That means we are not really strangers. Do you know who your mother's enemy is?"

"I heard from mother and master Lu that it's Scarlet something, something Chou.

The old man raised his head and mumbled, "Scarlet something?" He slammed his staff and said loudly, "Could it be the Scarlet Serpent Deity, Li Mochou?"

"Yes! It's the Scarlet Serpent Deity!" The old man's complexion changed completely. He said, "You two play here. Don't leave. I'll go and take a look."

The little girl said, "Grandpa, I want to come."

"Me too," added the boy.

The old man said, "No! Never! That witch is really powerful; I can't beat her. But when there are friends in need, one must go. You must listen." He walked away, his staff digging into the ground as he took each step.

Wu Xiuwen said respectfully, "Old Grandpa is blind and lame, yet he moves so fast."

The girl bent her lips and said, "What's so strange? If you saw my father's and mother's lightness kung fu you would be even more shocked."

"Your father and mother are also blind and lame?"

The girl angrily replied, "Your parents are blind and lame!"

It was now deep into the day, the farmers are in their fields; every man and woman was singing folk songs. He was originally from these parts. Though he was blind, he walked and asked for help at the same time, and in not too long he had reached the home of the Lu's. From afar he heard the exchange of blades, the "ping ping pang pang" clashing

indicating some ferocious stances. The Lu Zhanyuan family is a famous family in this area and he's just commoner. Although he is now a fairly famous martial artist he didn't approach and he also knew that he wasn't the Scarlet Serpent Deity's match. He knew that rushing in would just produce another corpse. But the matter involved a disciple of the Reverend Yideng and his debts to him were too many to measure (not exactly his debts, but what the girl's parents owed Yideng), he couldn't just stand by. He used more energy, and hurried to the village.

He heard fierce fighting on the roof involving four people. He turned his ear to one side to listen more carefully. From the breathing and sword clashing sounds, he could tell it was one versus three, though the three couldn't fend off the enemy and were losing.

Last night Wu Santong had carried off his sons, and the Lu couple wondered what he was up to now.

Madam Wu's spirits raised and said, "Though my husband acts wildly, when in danger he thinks clearly." Mistress Lu asked what she meant by this. Madam Wu replied, "I don't know if I've guessed correctly. Let's just wait and see."

As the night went on, Lu Wushuang fell asleep in her father's arms. Cheng Ying also eventually fell asleep. Mistress Lu wanted to take the children into their rooms.

Madam Wu said, "Leave them for a little longer." At that moment, someone shouted from the rooftop, "Throw them up here!" It was Wu Santong. His lightness kung fu was superb, mistress Lu didn't even notice he was on the roof. Madam Wu took Cheng Ying outside and threw her up to Wu Santong who caught her. The Lu couple swallowed, as Madam Wu threw Lu Wushuang up to Wu Santong as well, who then took them away.

Lu Liding was concerned and said, "Where are you taking them?" as he leapt onto the roof. But it was pitch black; there wasn't a trace of Wu Santong and the girls. Master Lu wanted to give chase, but Madam Wu shouted out, "There's no need to chase them, he's trying to do good."

Lu jumped down back into the hall and quivering asked, "What good deed?"

Mistress Lu said, "Wu Santong is scared that the witch is going to harm the children, so he has delivered them to a safe place." After he heard his wife say this he said, "Yes, it must be this." But as he thought about how Wu Santong took the corpse of his brother and sister-in-law away, he started to worry.

Madam Wu said, "Ever since Ah Yuan got married, every little girl he looked at reminded him of his troubles. I predicted that he would come back to carry the girls away and try to protect them. The first time he came here and took Ru'er and Wen'er away, I caught him glancing at the girls a few times; his face had an affectionate look, with no evil intent. He's pretending that they are Ah Yuan. Indeed he did come back for them. I hope this time he's not going to do anything stupid." She sighed twice, "You two better get some rest, we don't know when the witch will come, there's no need to wait anxiously."

The Lu couple was extremely worried about their daughter and niece, but decided to rest a little. Their fear and hate for the enemy filled them as they waited for her in the main hall, the both of them carrying swords and concealed weapons. They did not rest anymore. The couple has been married for eighteen years; through that time, the everyday business of running the home had its fair share of problems. But now when they think about the enemy, and what Brother and Madam Wu said about the enemy's strength, her cruel and

vindictive ways; they knew time was running out and held each other.

After a long while, in the midst of the solitude, a soft song was heard from afar, seemingly a long distance away but the lyrics were crystal clear, "O mortals, what is love, that binds beyond life on earth, to all corners, in pairs we fly" .

Each word seems to be getting closer and closer, the person singing the song seems to be approaching extremely fast. By the beginning of the third line, the person had arrived at the door.

The three of them were startled, as suddenly a crashing sound was heard; the bolt on the main door had broken, the door flew in two different directions. An attractive priestess, with an evil smile gently stepped in; she was dressed in an apricot yellow gown. It was the Scarlet Serpent Deity Li Mochou.

Ah Gen at the time was cleaning the courtyard; he spoke first. "Who are you?"

Lu Liding quickly said, "Ah Gen... runaway!" Could he escape?

Li Mochou moved her hand in a sweeping motion; Ah Gen's head was split open, dying without a sound. Lu Liding drew his sword. Li Mochou leaned to the side and brushed past him, and with another sweeping motion with her fly whisk, caused the two maids to die. She laughed evilly, "Where are your girls?"

The Lu couple had just seen three lives taken in the blink of an eye. They knew they would have no luck today; with swords in their hands they rushed to attack her from the left and right. Li Mochou was about to attack again when she saw Madam Wu at the side holding a sword and cackled, "So an

outsider wants to interfere, fine, you can join the dead in this house today!" Her voice was soft and graceful, her form exuding a delicate air. She had a pair of bright eyes, her skin white, and was a real beauty. They didn't see her leg movements as she floated to the rooftop. The Lu couple and Madam Wu leaped up to follow. Li Mochou swept her whisk and the weapons flew out of their hands. She gracefully said, "Master Lu, if your brother was still alive and told me he would divorce He Yuanjun, that slut, then I could have spared your whole family. But now, your luck is bad; you can't blame me, blame your short lived brother."

Lu Liding said, "Who asked you to spare us?" as he waved and chopped his knife blade at her. Madam Wu and mistress Lu both attacked from the front. Li Mochou saw Lu Liding's skills were very average, but the way he used his knife, his kicks and palms, reminded her of her loved one. Her heart ached, and she wanted to see this type of kung fu as long as she could. If she killed him, the "Jiangnan Lu Family Blade" kung fu would be lost forever, so she flung her whisk without any real intent, and allowed her three enemies to circle her, her heart in a tangle, unable to use her normal array of ruthless moves. Suddenly Li Mochou gently whistled, she moved from the house, and headed towards the river bank, and to a lame old man holding an iron walking staff, and swept her fly whisk at him trying to wrap it around his staff. Before her legs had touched the ground, she had already unleashed an attack on her enemy. Unleashing it when he wasn't prepared, her moves ruthless; she could teach the enemy how she could kill at all costs.

The old man heard the incoming attacks clearly; he lifted his staff across his body, getting ready to fight. He was aiming to pierce her right wrist. The iron staff is a heavy and clumsy weapon, only being able to sweep and smash. The old man is using a "piercing" type of kung fu, using the staff as a sword, and the moves he will unleash will be light and leisurely. Li

Mochou waved her fly whisk, the silver threaded end up, wrapping it around the old man's weapon. She shouted, "Let go!"

They struggled, borrowing strength to use strength, the fly whisk using the force in the iron staff to pull and drag the enemy towards it. The old man's arms were shaking severely, and struggling to hold on, he jumped up, his body slanting in midair to escape, and managed to fend off a skilful stroke of hers. He thought, "This tyrant does live up to her name." Li Mochou used the stance "Great Granddad Goes Fishing" (tai gong diao yu) followed by "Luring the Old Man" (yuan zhe shang diao) to snatch away the enemy's weapon. Usually this is a great move and would guarantee success, but before she could snatch away the iron staff, the man had anticipated this move. She thought, "Who is this lame old man? Why has he the ability to last this long?" On closer inspection, she could see that he was blind and immediately called out, "You are Ke Zhen'E!" The blind lame man was the head of the Jiangnan Seven Freaks "Flying Bat" Ke Zhen'E.

After Guo Jing and Huang Rong had participated in the Hua Mountain martial arts tournament, Huang Yaoshi organized their wedding on Peach Blossom Island. Huang Yaoshi had always been eccentric and disliked company, so after a few months of living with his daughter and son-in-law, he left the island in search of a more peaceful place to reside and left a letter. Huang Rong knew her father's temperament, but couldn't think of a solution so she reluctantly did nothing. At first her father would send news every few months, but after a year, news of him disappeared. Huang Rong missed her father and her teacher Hong Qigong, so along with Guo Jing, they went out in search of them, wandering Jianghu for months, but something made them return to the island. Huang Rong had become pregnant during this time. Huang Rong's body and health wasn't like normal people and she didn't have a moment's peace. Since she was pregnant,

traveling was not convenient, her mind was troubled, and she blamed her problems on Guo Jing.

A pregnancy reduces the body's ability to handle stress, although she loved Guo Jing deeply, she always found a reason to quarrel with him as he didn't care about searching. Guo Jing knew his wife's temper, so ignored what she said and treated it as a joke. She had a great deal on her mind and eventually stopped smiling; this troubled Guo Jing. Ten months passed and Huang Rong gave birth to a baby girl, and she was named Guo Fu. Huang Rong was unhappy during the pregnancy but after she gave birth, she spoiled her daughter. When she was just one, she exhibited the signs of disobedience and of being spoiled. Sometimes Guo Jing would not let things stand and scolded his daughter, but every time Huang Rong would protect her. The result was that the daughter became even more of a spoilt brat. When Guo Fu was five, Huang Rong began to teach her martial arts. Once, Guo Fu turned her room into her own animal playground when she cut and plucked every single insect, bird and beasts on the island. Their feathers and fur were gone, not even leaving any on their heads. Firstly, Guo Jing loved his wife dearly; secondly, he also loved his mischievous daughter very much. Whenever he tried to punish her, she would put on a pitiful face and say she was sorry; he would just sigh, and slowly put down his raised hand.

As time went on, there was still no news of Huang Yaoshi and Hong Qigong. The couple missed them terribly whenever they thought about them. Guo Jing also tried a few times to invite his Great Master Ke Zhen'E to the island to enjoy his old age. But Ke Zhen'E was a city dweller at heart, drinking and gambling was a hobby to him and so declined the invitation. One day he went to the island by himself, not being picked up by Guo Jing. What had happened was that he was having no luck, the more he gambled the more he lost, and he ended up with great debts. He had nowhere to

go, and had to escape his debts. Guo Jing and Huang Rong were delighted to see him, and kept him on the island not permitting him to leave. Huang Rong eventually found about the debts, and secretly sent out someone to pay them. Ke Zhen'E didn't know about this, so he dare not return to Jiaxing, and resided on the island with nothing to do. As a result he had become a playmate for Guo Fu.

A couple of years passed and Guo Fu had become nine. Huang Rong still missed her father and with Guo Jing was going to leave the island in search of him. When Ke Zhen'E knew about this, he insisted that he would come along. That meant that Guo Fu had to come along with him. When they left the island, Ke Zhen'E said, "We can go anywhere, anywhere but Jiaxing."

Huang Rong smiled and said, "Great Master, you don't know, I already paid your debts a long time ago." Ke Zhen'E laughed and insisted they go to Jiaxing first.

Once the four had arrived in Jiaxing, they stayed at an inn. Ke Zhen'E heard from his sources that a few days ago, an old man dressed in a blue green gown was drinking alone in the Smoke Rain inn. From the description it sounded like it was Huang Yaoshi. Guo Jing and Huang Rong were delighted by this news, and searched the town and villages of Jiaxing. It was a beautiful day, so Ke Zhen'E took Guo Fu along with the eagles to the forest to play, and by a coincidence bumped into Wu Xiuwen.

After Ke Zhen'E exchanged a few moves with Li Mochou, he knew that he wasn't her match and thought, "That witch's skills are high, not below the once alive Mei Chao Feng. He used the "Ambush Evil Cane" moves, guarding the door. Li Mochou thought, "I've heard from brother Lu that in Jiaxing the more famous of the martial artists was the Jiangnan Seven Freaks. Their kung fu not at all simple and they had a

famous disciple, Guo Jing. He is the head of the Seven Freaks and he indeed lives up to his name. He is blind and lame, and now very old, yet he can still manage to last ten or so moves with me." Suddenly she heard the shouts from the Lu couple and Madam Wu heading up attack at her. "Hurting that old Ke Zhen'E is not a hard thing to do, but if I have the Guo couple tracking me, then that would make things hard. Today I'll just let him go."

The fly whisk extended, the silver threads stiffened, the whisk now like a spear heading towards Ke Zhen'E's chest. The whisk's threads are soft but behind a skilled force, the whisk is able to harm the major pressure points, any hits it lands will be lethal. Ke Zhen'E had planted the iron walking staff in the ground, relying on it to jump backwards. Li Mochou jumped ahead, advancing to attack from behind. Her waist extremely flexible, she turned and jumped behind him, with Madam Wu not further than two meters from her shoulder. Madam Wu gulped, and hurried a left palm aimed at her forehead. Li Mochou gently moved her waist, like a flower floating in the wind, and escaped while unleashing a palm, hitting mistress Lu in the abdomen.

Mistress Lu walked forward three steps, and fell to the ground. Master Lu saw his wife on the ground and waved his blade with his right hand, using his lone blade to drive Li Mochou back. Then he used his two hands and rushed at her, wanting to perish together with his wife. Li Mochou, after she failed in love, she detested signs of love, and when she saw Lu Liding rushing at her, she was filled with immense hatred, and used her whisk to hit the lone blade. She swept her fly whisk, and after a "shua" noise, he was hit on the crown of his head.

Li Mochou had seriously wounded the couple in just a wink, even though they had the help of Ke Zhen'E and Madam Wu. She laughed and asked, "Where are the two girls?" Before

Madam Wu could reply, a flash of yellow went into the house. Li Mochou searched high and low but there was no trace of the girls. She got a torch from the kitchen, and set the firewood alight in the room. She came out and laughed, "I don't have any past feuds with Peach Blossom Island, or Reverend Yideng. You two can leave."

Ke Zhen'E and Madam Wu knew how ruthless and malicious she was and with hatred on their faces, they attacked her. Li Mochou dodged the sword and staff, and waved her whisk; Madam Wu's weapon was tangled. The two pulled their weapons, but the force behind the whisk was greater and after a sound, the sword had been broken into two pieces, the sword tip heading towards Madam Wu, and the handle towards Ke Zhen'E.

Madam Wu had lost her weapon, swallowed, and couldn't believe that she could use her fly whisk to break a sword in half, and immediately deflect the two pieces of sword towards the two. The blade was coming at her extremely fast; she quickly lowered her head, and felt the blade brush past her, cutting a segment of her hair.

Ke Zhen'E heard the sound of a sword breaking, and used his staff to dodge the flying handle. He heard Madam Wu shout. He moved his staff like wind, attacking with every movement. His left hand holding three small poisonous projectiles, poised, but thought about Li Mochou's deadly "Soul Freezing Silver Needles" If he used his projectiles, she would certainly use hers; since he's blind, he would not be able to see them so he refrained from using his.

Li Mochou still went soft on him, thinking, "The blind old man's not resorting to concealed weapons; he must be scared of me returning the favour." She lightly twisted her waist, and used her whisk to wrap around the old man's iron staff. Ke Zhen'E just felt a strong force pulling him, wanting

to take his weapon out of his grasp. He circulated his internal energy, channeling it through his iron walking staff, and contested internal energy with his opponent. But didn't know exactly where she was. In a flash, his bones started to shake, his strength draining out of him. Li Mochou had used her left hand to push away the staff to one side; a left palm had already gently pushed Ke Zhen'E in the chest. She laughed, "Old Man Ke, the "Divine Scarlet Palm" has hit you in your chest!"

Ke Zhen'E had no ability to defend himself now, and thought, "Lowlife, you can finish me, what more do you want now?"

Madam Wu saw this, and felt deeply responsible. Li Mochou leapt up from the iron staff, and in midair stretched her hand out towards Madam Wu, gently touching her on the face. She laughed and said, "You chased away my disciple, you sure have guts." After a few graceful laughs she fled. Madam Wu had felt her soft and gentle palm, the place where she had touched had become relaxed. She saw her heading towards the thick growth of willow trees, and in a flash had disappeared. She thought about the few moves she exchanged with Li Mochou, her moves seemed designed to let her live and weren't at full strength. Suddenly she felt she had no strength and fell to the ground paralyzed. Ke Zhen'E was touched in the chest and he too was struggling by a rock, He breathed in quickly, then slowed his breaths.

After a long while, Madam Wu exerted some strength to get up, and saw black smoke rising, the Lu home in flames. At the time, Ke Zhen'E tried to carry the Lu couple out but saw they were short of breath and thought to himself; "If I move them now, they are just going to die quicker, but I can't leave them here. What should I do?"

In the middle of this problem, a loud voice suddenly called out, "Wife, are you alright?" It was Wu Santong's voice.

End of Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 - A Friend's Son

Translated by Noodles



Suddenly a flash of yellow went over to Wu San Tong, Li Mo Chou had landed on the tree branch that Wu San Tong was holding, and swept her fly whisk at him forcing him to drop it. Wu San Tong jumped, and hurriedly picked up the branch from the ground. After ten moves or so, when Wu San Tong tried to sweep her with the branch, she flew onto the top of a willow tree. She let him attack with the tree trunk.

These past ten years he has never shown a touch of concern towards her, so she was delighted when she heard this, and replied, "I'm over here."

Wu Santong leapt in front of her, the Lu couple carried in each hand. He said, "Quickly follow me," and went on his way. Ke Zhen'E and Madam Wu followed behind him.

Wu Santong swerved east and twisted west for a few miles, and led the two to an old, broken kiln. It was a large old kiln used for making wine bottles. Madam Wu entered, and saw her two sons, Xiuwen and Dunru were safe and sound. She let out a sigh of relief. The Wu brothers were sitting on the ground playing with stones with Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang. When Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang saw the Lu couple, they threw themselves onto them, shouting and crying.

Ke Zhen'E heard Lu Wushuang cry out mother and father he immediately said, "Oh no, we've lured the ghost out, that witch is going to be here soon!"

Madam Wu's heart was afraid. She asked, "How?"

Ke Zhen'E replied, "That witch wants the Lu girls, but doesn't know where they are."

Madam Wu suddenly realized what he meant and swallowed. "Yes, she purposely let us go so she could secretly follow us."

Wu Santong shouted out, "If the Scarlet Witch is following, then I'll go and face her." He turned around and stood at the opening of the kiln.

Lu Liding's skull had been severely injured but he had one last wish so he strained out a breath and called out to Cheng Ying.

"Ah Ying, take out the handkerchief that I've got on my chest."

Cheng Ying, her eyes full of tears, stretched out her hand and took out the handkerchief. It was a white satin handkerchief, in the four corners were sewn a red flower. The red flower looked withered and by it was a jade green leaf. The white satin was old and had become yellow, the embroidery of the flower and leaf were beautiful, almost like the real thing. Lu Liding said, "Ah Ying, tie the handkerchief around your neck, you mustn't untie it, you understand?" Cheng Ying didn't know what her uncle meant, but did as she was told and nodded.

Mistress Lu was severely hurt but when she heard her husband's words, she forced her eyes open and said, "Why aren't you giving it to Shuang'er? Give it to Shuang'er" Mistress Lu quickly added, "You haven't got a heart. Are you not worried about your own daughter's safety?" As she said this her eyes went white, her voice faded. Lu Wushuang didn't know what her parents were arguing about and she cried out, "Father...Mother!" Lu Liding softly said, "Dear wife, you love Shuang'er very much, so why don't we let her follow us?"

Originally, the red flower and green leaf handkerchief was a lover's gift from Li Mochou to Lu Zhenyuan. The red flower was the famous Man Tuo Luo flower from Dali. Li Mochou figured that Lu sounds like green, the green leaf representing her beloved, and thought "Red Flower Green Leaf, will always be together." Before He Yuanjun died, she knew that on the ten-year deadline, Mo Chou and Wu Santong would come and cause trouble. She had a plan to deal with the two, but didn't expect the sudden illness of Lu Zhenyuan. She knew Lu Liding's kung fu was average, and wouldn't be able to escape when the time came, so she gave him the handkerchief, and made him understand, if it was

Wu Santong who came to seek revenge, to act normal and restrain from attacking as he does not intend to take any lives. But Li Mochou had become infamous in Jianghu in recent years with her cruel and vindictive methods, meeting her would be your bad luck. If it was her, then tie the handkerchief around your neck, this will stir up any old memories that witch would have of your brother and hopefully she will let you go. But Lu Liding was a proud man, and would not beg Li Mochou for his life.

Cheng Ying was the daughter of his brother. Before he died, he requested that Lu Liding bring up his daughter like his own. He was obligated by the request of a good friend, but in the danger that they are now in, he would not be able to fulfill this request and so gave the life saving handkerchief to Cheng Ying. Mistress Lu had realized what he was doing and saw that he was sacrificing his own daughter. Under the strain she suffered severe pain and left the world.

Cheng Ying saw that the handkerchief was the cause of her aunt's troubles, took off the handkerchief, and gave it to her cousin saying, "Aunt said to give this to you, take it!"

Lu Liding said, "Shuang'er, it's your cousin's, don't take it."

Madam Wu was standing to the side when she heard all this and said, "I am going to tear the handkerchief in half, half to each, is that a good idea?"

Lu Liding had not the strength to reply anymore, and just nodded. Madam Wu tore the handkerchief in half, and gave each half to the cousins.

Wu Santong was standing by the entrance when he heard all the commotion, and went inside to see what all the fuss was about. He saw his wife's face and on the left cheek was a black patch. Startled, he pointed to his wife's face and asked, "Why is your face like that?"

Madam Wu reached out and touched her face and said, "Like what?" only to feel no sensation in her left cheek, her heart jumped and realized it was where Li Mochou had touched her. Can it be that when she touched her face gently she used the chance to emit poison?

Wu Santong was inside asking questions when a voice from the entrance said, "The two little girls are inside, aren't they? They can't live so just give them to me. If you don't, I'll burn you all in this kiln. The voice was clear and gentle.

Wu Santong jumped out of the kiln, and saw Li Mochou standing at the entrance, and thought in wonder, "It has been ten years, yet she still looks like she did then."

He had recognized that she had now become a priestess, but he couldn't change his way of greeting her, and greeted her as he had before as Miss Li. Within these past ten years, no had called her "Miss Li"; now when she heard those words, her heart moved, her memories and feelings as a young girl rushed to her chest. But then she remembered she could have spent her life with the person she loved, but there existed a He Yuanjun who caused her to lose her loved one. She was resigned to being alone forever. As she thought about this her emotions came over her again and she was unable to resist the pain.

Wu Santong is another one who had his love rejected; even though their love was a different sort, it is still love. When he was searching for Lu Zhanyuan, he saw with his own eyes Li Mochou kill He Lao Quanshi's family, a total of twenty men, women, old and young without remorse or feeling. To think about it made him shiver. He Lao Quanshi and she had never met; they had no feuds and no relations to He Yuanjun. But because they shared the same surname, it provoked her hate and fury and she killed every last member of the He family. Even before he died, he didn't know the reason for

his death. At the time Wu Santong didn't intervene, as he didn't know the background to the matter. Only after he heard that it was for this simple reason, he swore to himself that he would treat her with the utmost hate and disgust. He saw that she had a gentle, kindly smile but she could change that to a cold and evil smile immediately. He was extremely worried about the safety of the two girls.

Li Mochou said, "I only printed nine palms on the Lu's wall, I must kill those two girls. Wu Santong, please step aside."

Wu Santong replied, "Lu Zhenyuan and his wife are dead now, his brother and wife died under your hands, its only two girls, you can just leave them."

Li Mochou grinned and shook her head, gently saying "Wu Santong, please step aside."

Wu Santong gripped tighter to his chestnut tree and said, "Miss Li, the reason for your hatred is Ah Yuan."

When the two words 'Ah Yuan' was said, Li Mochou's face changed and she said, "I once swore that whoever mentioned that slut's name in front of me will be killed by me or I would perish trying. I once destroyed sixty-three families in their boats on the river Yuan simply because they shared the name of that slut. Surely you've heard of this? Master Wu, it is your fault, so don't blame me." While she said this she swung her weapon at Wu Santong's neck.

Though she seemed to have swung her fly whisk lightly, the stroke was fierce and quick, causing Wu Santong to fly right and left above her to avoid the strokes. She knew that Wu Santong is a high disciple of Reverend Yideng, although he is in a state of confusion, his kung fu was still solid; when the need arose he could still kill. Wu Santong's left hand straightened, the tree trunk came out with great force, and swept across. Li Mochou saw the power in this, and

immediately floated away, avoiding getting struck by the trunk. She didn't wait for him to use the trunk again and flew in front attacking, trying to break inside. Wu Santong saw that she was heading into the kiln, and raised his right hand, and pointed a finger at one of her pressure points, and unleashed "Solitary Yang Finger" at her.

Though his "Solitary Yang Finger" wasn't fast enough to hit a pressure point, the move had many changes, and had to be avoided. Li Mochou used "Strike the Golden Clock" and immediately jumped back ten feet. Wu Santong saw her moving forwards and backwards, in a flash she had advanced and retreated so many times, his heart secretly quivered. When she was retreating he used his strength and used the tree trunk again to force her back. But as soon as he did this, she advanced right in front of him, if it wasn't for the "Solitary Yang Finger", he would have been out matched long ago. The tree trunk was heavy, and every time he moved it, he would exert a lot of strength, Li Mochou had noticed this, and tried to wear him out using this method.

Suddenly a flash of yellow went over to Wu Santong, Li Mochou had landed on the tree branch that Wu Santong was holding, and swept her fly whisk at him forcing him to drop it. Wu Santong jumped, and hurriedly picked up the branch from the ground. Li Mochou laughed, as she hurriedly went over to the tree trunk and stepped on it. Wu Santong turned around and extended a finger. She moved again, heading back towards the tree branch. After ten moves or so, when Wu Santong tried to sweep her with the branch, she flew onto the top of a willow tree. She let him attack with the tree trunk. This way, Wu Santong would use even more strength. Although she was fairly light she added to the weight of the tree that she was standing on, the trunk would not be able to knock her off. This position also allowed her to attack the kiln. She was in a position where she could not lose. Wu

Santong glanced at her, and knew he must be patient; he wasn't too concerned about his own life, but if the kiln full of old and young fell into her hands it would be terrible. At that time the tree trunk was flying wilder and quicker, fiercely colliding with the tree trying to shake Li Mochou out of it.

After a moment he heard Ke Zhen'E shout, "Fu'er, you have arrived, quickly, get the eagles to get rid of that evil woman." Following this a girl's whistle could be heard, in the sky were two white images in formation descending. It was the two large eagles, attacking Li Mochou from the left and right. Guo Fu had arrived with the eagles. Li Mochou saw the two eagles coming at her so she held on to the tree tightly with her left foot. The eagles' attack wasn't successful and they headed back to the sky. The girl whistled again a few times. The two eagles came in for a second attack, and aimed at the underside of the tree.

Li Mochou had heard Peach Blossom Island's Guo Jing and Huang Rong had a pair of giant eagles, who were almost telepathic with each other. At the time the eagles were coming together for an attack. She wasn't worried about the eagles, but the fact they belonged to the Guo couple meant that the Guo couple must be nearby. This would complicate matters. Li Mochou dodged a few times, and then launched her own attack on the eagles, injuring one of the eagles' left wing; the eagle screeched and fell to the ground. When Guo Fu saw that her eagle was hurt, she shouted out, "Eagle don't be scared, keep attacking that evil woman." Li Mochou looked at the girl who said this, and saw a little girl that seemed to have come from a beautiful painting and thought, "I've heard that heroine Huang was one of the most beautiful women in the world. I wonder how she compares with me? Is this girl her daughter?"

While she was being distracted, her moves slowed. Wu Santong saw that although the eagles were helping, they

could still not force Li Mochou from the tree. Amid the chirping and screeching he fiercely hit the ground with his two hands, and caused Li Mochou to fly off the tree. Li Mochou could not predict that he would unleash such an unusual move, and was forced tens of feet into the air. When the eagles saw that she was in the air, they went in for another attack from above. When she had a secure grip, the eagles could not really harm her but now that she is in the air, how could she compete with them? In this desperate situation, she waved her fly whisk in front of her face to protect her head, and withdrew three "Soul Freezing Silver Needles", and shot them out hurriedly. Two were aimed at the eagles, the other one at Wu Santong's chest. The eagles saw the needles coming and quickly flew higher to evade them, but the needles were traveling at such a high speed, and after a second, the male eagle was hit in a claw. Wu Santong was looking up when he saw the incoming needle, and leapt out of the way in a rush, but was still hit in his left leg. Wu Santong got up after a roll. He knew he had been hit in his left leg but didn't call out. Left kneeling, he circulated his inner strength to allow him to support himself. His leg was now swollen and numb. He stooped down, and used his hands to try to support himself; but he could not and eventually fell down on to the ground motionless.

Guo Fu shouted, "Eagles, eagles come here quickly." But the two eagles had flown far away, and didn't turn back.

Li Mochou said, "Little girl, is your name Guo?"

Guo Fu saw that the woman standing in front of her was beautiful, she had a friendly disposition and did not look like an 'evil woman' and replied, "Yes, my name is Guo. What is yours?" Li Mochou laughed and said, "Come, I'll take you to play," while slowly walking towards her, with the intention to grab her.

Ke Zhen'E, supporting himself with his iron staff, rushed out of the kiln and shouted, "Fu'er, run quickly!" Li Mochou laughed and said, "Scared I'm going to eat her up?"

At that time, a young boy in ragged garments holding a chicken in his left hand, and singing a folk song, rushed over and saw the people in the kiln and said, "Hey, what are you people doing in my home?" He went over to where Li Mochou and Guo Fu were and laughed and said, "He-he, old beauty you're pretty, little beauty you are cute, are you two here to find me? However this person named Yang hasn't got any beauties for friends." His face carried a smirk and his attitude was sly.

Guo Fu sneered and said, "Who wants to look for you?"

The boy replied, "If you are not looking for me, why are you at my home?" and pointed to the kiln, indicating it was his home.

"Huh, who wants to go to that unsightly place?"

Madam Wu saw that her husband was on the ground, and didn't know whether he was dead or alive. She came rushing out of the kiln to his side and said, "Brother San, are you okay?" Wu Santong gave out a moan and struggled to get up, but in the end he could not stand up. Guo Fu gazed afar but still couldn't see the two eagles, and shouted, "Eagles, eagles, come back here!"

Li Mochou thought, "If I wait for the Guo couple to arrive, it'll be hard for me to escape." She laughed evilly and headed for the kiln. Madam Wu rushed to cut her off, and waved her sword saying, "You can't enter!"

Li Mochou smiled and replied, "This is the little brother's home, how can you be in charge here?" Her left palm was facing the sword's tip, and headed straight for it, wanting to

touch the blade, her palm twisted; her three fingers now holding the sword's sides, she flipped the sword tip towards Madam Wu. It was pointing towards Madam Wu's forehead, there was a sound and her forehead had been cut. Li Mochou laughed and said, "Sorry for the offence!" She placed her fly whisk in her belt, and headed into the kiln. She grabbed Lu Wushuang and Cheng Ying in each hand, and without turning her back, she flipped herself over and headed out of the kiln, avoiding Ke Zhen'E's iron staff.

The ragged young boy saw Li Mochou had hurt Madam Wu and snatch the two girls so didn't dare to step out of line again. But when he heard the cousin's cries, he jumped onto Li Mochou shouting, "Hey old beauty, you've hurt and snatched people, you haven't even greeted the owner, you are too rude, let the girls go."

Li Mochou was carrying the girls in both her arms, and had no way to stop the young boy from grabbing onto her. Her heart shivered, as there was a pair of arms holding onto the side of her body, her whole body softened involuntary. At the time she charged her palms, and flung the two girls away, and immediately grabbed the boy. Within these last ten years a man has never touched her, and though she had lived for thirty years she is still a virgin. In the past when Lu Zhanyuan was infatuated with her, he still treated her with respect. A lot of young heroes in Jianghu had seen her beauty but dare not show their feelings as they knew that they will die a violent death from the "Scarlet Serpent Deity's" palm. But today, a young boy is holding onto her; she grabbed him and intended to charge her palm and shatter the boy's heart, but then thought about how he praised her beauty sincerely, in her heart she was pleased. When those words came from the mouths of men, she loathed it but from the mouth of a thirteen or fourteen year

old, the words felt different. In a moment of weakness she did not lower her palm onto him.

Suddenly she heard the cries of the eagles; they had come back for another raid. Li Mochou gathered two "Soul Freezing Silver Needles" and immediately shot them out. The pair of eagles had previously suffered from this concealed weapon, and rushed to fly higher, but the silver needles were coming at them at a fast pace. The eagles could fly fast, but the needles were faster and eagles cried out in fright. Li Mochou saw that the eagles had retreated once again, and was extremely pleased. Suddenly she heard two shouts, two small objects rapidly appeared in the sky and after a loud noise the two small objects knocked the needles out of the air in a flash. Whoever threw the objects, their power must be extremely high. She gulped and dropped the young man, and went over to see. It was two small stones. She thought, "The person who shot out the stones must be extremely skilled, I'm not his match, I better evade him first and think about this later."

She turned around and stretched out her palm, facing Cheng Ying. She wanted to hurt the two cousins first and then escape. As her palm was about to reach her chest, Li Mochou saw there was a satin handkerchief tied around her neck, the embroidery on it was of a red flower and green leaf, it was the handkerchief that she had personally sewn and had given it to her lover. She didn't move and lowered her palm, her heart was turning over with memories of before, and thought, "Although he married the He slut, he could not forget me and kept this handkerchief. He wants me to spare his heirs, should I spare them or not?" She could not decide, and decided to kill Lu Wushuang and discuss this later. She took out her fly whisk, the silver thread end facing Lu Wushuang, and as she headed for her chest, she saw another handkerchief tied around Lu Wushuang's neck. She

thought, "How come there are two handkerchiefs? One of them must be a fake." She curled up her whisk, and held Lu Wushuang's neck as she shook and moved her around.

At this time, a sound cutting through the air was heard; a small stone was flying towards her chest. Li Mochou took out her fly whisk and immediately struck out, knocking the stone out of the air. She shouted out in pain as her palm heated up, her body shaking. Just a small stone with so much power, whoever threw must be extremely skilled. She couldn't stay here anymore, and grabbed Lu Wushuang, and used her lightness kung fu. She swept over the ground like a gust of wind and in a flash there was no trace of her.

Cheng Ying saw that her cousin had been taken away and shouted, "Cousin! Cousin!" and tried to follow. Li Mochou's steps were extremely rapid, how could she catch them?

Jiangnan is a wet area and full of rivers, and after a while Cheng Ying had come upon a river blocking her way, with no way to proceed. She followed along the bank, and suddenly saw a yellow image on the left side, a person crossing the bridge alone. Cheng Ying waited a while and saw that Li Mochou was on her own, Lu Wushuang wasn't to be seen anywhere. Cheng Ying saw her turn around and though extremely frightened, dared to ask, "Where's my cousin?" Li Mochou saw her white skin and handsome smile and coldly laughed, "You two look the same, she has many days in front of her, don't worry about her. You should worry about yourself. Why didn't you die early, the world would have less trouble." She raised her fly whisk, and hit out. She saw that the stroke she was going to use to strike the chest had become slow and light. With the fly whisk behind her back, she was going to attack in front of her but as she sped up, something was holding onto the whisk's tail and she was unable to fling it. She swallowed and turned around to look, and saw the ground was raised over her about ten feet in the

air and collapsing. It was an extraordinary situation. She protected her chest with her left palm and channeled energy through her fly whisk and pierced through the dirt. How can it be that there was no one behind it, just empty space? She had fought hundreds of battles throughout her life, but had never encountered a situation like this, her brain flicking through many scenarios, "A monster... a demon?" She used a stance of "First Mixing Form", the fly whisk forming a circular boundary shielding her before she turned around again.

She saw, standing by Cheng Ying, a tall, lean strange man dressed in a blue jade gown, with no expression on his face. Who was he, and as she looked at him she couldn't think of anything to say. She took two steps back and in this short space of time she could not think who in Jianghu this powerful person might be. As she was about to inquire who he was, she heard the man speak to Cheng Ying.

"Little girl, that woman is really evil, and you went to fight her." Cheng Ying raised her hand and head and replied, "I wouldn't dare." The man said, "What are you afraid of? Go ahead." Cheng Ying didn't dare to. The man grabbed her and pushed her towards Li Mochou.

In this situation, Li Mochou didn't know how to react. She planned to use her fly whisk; she stretched out her left hand to reach it, aiming to hit Cheng Ying on the waist. Suddenly a chi sound was produced; her arm was numb and sore, and she was unable to pick up her weapon. Cheng Ying approached her with her palm out, and after a clashing sound, Li Mochou was struck in the chest with a palm. Li Mochou had never suffered such an insult in her life, and in a rage, forgot her worries and reached out for her weapon and struck out in fury. Her whisk flew out of her hand, causing her to shake; the man had shot out another pebble,

knocking her weapon to the ground. Cheng Ying was standing there steadily.

Li Mochou knew that she had met trouble today; if she didn't escape now her life would be in danger. She laughed lightly and turned around and hurried away. After she was many steps away she waved her hands behind her. A glimmer of silver appeared, ten plus "Soul Freezing Silver Needles" were shot out towards the man in light green. She shot her concealed weapons without turning back, but every single needle was heading towards the man. The man was caught off guard, not knowing that her needle throwing skill was so deadly. He immediately flew backwards to evade the needles. The needles were coming at him at a fast pace, but his leaps were quicker. Only after he had heard all the needles hit something did he stop and return to ground. Li Mochou knew that she wouldn't be able to hit him, the ten or so needles were meant to distract him, when she heard the wind sounds caused by him retreating backwards, her hand waved again, a lone needle was shot out at Cheng Ying. She knew that the needle must hit the target; afraid of exchanging blows with the man she didn't look back and increased her efforts in escaping, her body disappearing into the mulberry forest. The man in the blue green gown said, "Ah!" and picked up Cheng Ying and saw a needle had hit her shoulder, her face had changed colour and she gave out a quiet moan. Carrying her he hurriedly headed west.

The kidnapping of Lu Wushuang had startled Ke Zhen'E. The ragged young man said, "I'll take a look."

Guo Fu replied, "What is there to look at? That evil woman is going to kick you to death."

The young man smiled and replied, "You kick me to death? I wouldn't want to see that." As he said this he headed in the direction of Li Mochou.

Guo Fu said, "Idiot! I didn't say I was going to kick you." Guo Fu didn't realize that boy made a play on the words and said she was the evil woman.

The boy hurried as fast as he could for a while when he suddenly heard the calls of Cheng Ying shouting out, "Cousin, cousin!" He followed the sound of the calls. He ran over a great distance following the calls and he eventually arrived at where the calls seemingly came from. But when he got there was no trace of the two girls in any direction. He turned his head and on the ground glimmering were ten or so silver needles, the needles forming a pattern. He stooped down and picked up a needle, holding it in his left hand. By the needles there was a large centipede with its underside facing up, dead. He thought this was strange, and took a close look and saw a large number of ants were dead, but a few steps away were many ants rushing and moving. He picked up a needle and poked at them a few times, and some of the ants rolled over a few times before facing up. The same happened with a few other insects.

The young boy was happy, thinking this would be great to use on mosquitoes and flies, but suddenly felt that his left hand was not responding as normal. A fierce voice from behind said, "The needles have poison on them! You are holding it in your left hand how can it not be dangerous?" He opened his left palm and abandoned the needle. There is a black mark already forming in the place where the needle was held, and his two fingers were also turning black. He was extremely frightened, and stretched out his hand and rubbed it on his leg fiercely. The numbness on his left hand slowly increased, and within minutes the numbness had reached his joints. He was once bitten by a poisonous snake, and almost lost his life; at the time, the place where he was bitten became numb. He was in danger and he eventually cried out due to the pain. A voice from behind said, "Little

baby, you know how powerful it is now huh?" The sound was like the clanging of metals piercing his ear, as if it was coming from the ground. He turned around and gulped as he saw a man standing upside down. The boy retreated a few steps and asked, "Who...who...who are you?"

The man's hands were on the ground supporting himself, his body upright and with a jump; he traveled thirty feet to face the boy.

"Who am I? It would be great to know who I am."

The boy was startled and started to run away, only to hear a 'du' 'du' 'du' noise behind him. He turned around and was so scared that his soul jumped out of his body. The man is using his hands as his feet, each hand held a stone, and although he was walking upside down his speed was faster than walking on two feet, and was just a few meters behind him. He ran even faster scared for his life only to hear a sound as the man jumped over his head and landed in front of him. The boy shouted out, "Mother!" and turned around to escape but wherever he went the strange man would jump in front of him. He had two feet, but he wasn't a match for a person using his hands to walk. He turned around a few times but the man was getting closer so he stretched out his palm wanting to push him; his hand was numb and he had lost control over it long ago. His head was covered with sweat and now didn't know what to do, his legs went limp and he sat down on the ground.

The strange man said, "The more you run and move about, the quicker the poison will spread." The boy worried for his life, got down on his knees and said, "I beg old grandpa to save my life."

The strange man shook his head and said, "It's difficult, it's difficult."

The boy replied, "Your have so much skill, you can save me."

After the old man heard these words of praise, he was pleased and grinned, "How do you know that I'm so skilled?" The young boy heard his tone had become friendly and replied, "You run so fast while upside down. No one on earth can compete with you." The boy had added the phrase "No one on earth can compete with you" knowing that words of praise would please the old man. The old man laughed loudly, his laugh shaking the trees in the forest and said, "Flip upside down, let me take a look."

The boy was bright, and immediately flipped upside down by himself, he couldn't tell if the man was sincere but he did as he was told and flipped his body upside down so that his head was on the ground. His right hand still had feeling in it and managed to support himself firmly. The strange man glanced at him a few times, his brows lowered and wrinkled. The boy was upside down but still managed to take a clear look at the man; he had a tall nose and deep set eyes, his face covered in a short white beard, his limbs like metal, he talked to himself in strange phrases which was hard on the ear. The young boy was scared that the man wasn't going to save him and said, "Good Grandpa, please save me." The man saw he was a strapping boy and was pleased by his flip and replied, "Fine, saving you is not hard, but you got to promise one thing."

"Whatever you say, I'll listen. What do you want me to promise you?"

The strange man smiled and said, "I only want you to promise me one thing. Whatever I say, you must obey."

The boy thought, "I must obey everything you say? I've got to listen even when you tell me to be a dog or eat feces?"

The man saw that he was hesitant and slow to reply said, "Fine, you can die!" As he said this he got onto his hands and leapt away several meters.

The boy was afraid that the man had gone too far, and wanted to chase him to ask for help but he forgot that he could not walk upside down like the man, so he got back upright and chased a few steps and called out, "Grandpa, I agree. Whatever you say, I will obey."

The man turned around and said, "Fine, you've to swear it." The boy's left hand was becoming increasingly numb, and he was becoming increasingly concerned about his life so he could do nothing but swear an oath.

"If grandpa saves me by ridding my body of the poison, I will listen to whatever he says. If I don't, then let the poison return to my body." He thought, "If I never pick up any more silver needles then how will the poison return? I wonder if the strange man will accept this oath?"

He looked at the old man, and saw his expression had changed and he seemed pleased, and he in turn became pleased as well as he thought, "The old man believes me."

The old man nodded and went upright. He grabbed hold of the boy's arm, and pushed it a few times and said, "Good, good, you are a good boy." When the boy was pushed in the arm, he felt the numbness had lightened, and shouted out, "Grandpa, push me a few more times!" The strange man frowned and said, "Don't call me grandpa; call me father!"

The little boy replied, "My father's dead, I don't have a father."

The man shouted at him, "The first thing I ask and you don't even listen, what use have I with a son like you."

The boy thought, "Oh, the man wants me to be his son." He had never seen his father before, and heard from his mother that his father had died before he was born. Whenever he saw other children with their father he would envy them. Now he sees this strange man in front of him, acting weird and crazy. He didn't want to accept this old man as his stepfather.

The strange man shouted at him, "You don't agree to call me father, fine. There are other people who are willing, I won't agree to my promise." The boy tried to think of another way to deceive him into saving him. The man suddenly bellowed out a strange noise, and said a curse and started to walk away. The boy quickly said, "Father, father where are you going?" The man gave out a great laugh and said, "Good boy, come, I'll teach you a method to rid your body of poison." The boy walked over to him. The strange man said, "You have contracted Li Mochou's "Soul Freezing Silver Needles" poison, it is quite difficult to cure this poison."

He then passed on the words of circulating air and the method to practice it, the head must be below the legs, so the blood will flow the opposite direction, the poison will eventually flow out from within the body. Since he is a beginner, he can only remove a few drops of poison every day, but within a month, all the poison would be removed from his body. The boy was extremely clever, and he absorbed everything and memorized it. He then followed the method and indeed, the numbness decreased. After a little while, small drops of black blood seeped from his fingers. The strange man was pleased and said, "Good! You don't have to practice anymore today, I'll teach you something new tomorrow. Follow me." The boy was startled, and said, "Go where?" The strange man replied, "I am your father, wherever a father goes, the son of course follows."

As he said this, the air was filled with the sound of eagle calls; the two large eagles were approaching. The strange man looked at the eagles, and hit his head as he frowned, searching for something in his mind. Suddenly, he seemed to have found what he was looking for, his face changed and shouted out, "I won't see them, I won't see them!" As he said this he took a stride; the stride was extremely large, and by the second stride he had moved over ten feet. After a few more strides he disappeared into the mulberry forest. The boy shouted out, "Father, father!" and tried to follow.

He eventually wound up at a willow tree and suddenly he felt a gust of wind behind him, as the eagles flew over from behind him and started to descend. From behind the willow tree out came two people, a male and female, the eagles stopped behind the two. The male had dense brows and large eyes, a broad chest and waist, he was about thirty years of age, and his top lip had the beginnings of a moustache. The woman was about twenty six or twenty seven years of age, she had a beautiful face, her eyes sparkled, and looked at the boy a few times and said to the man, "Who do you think that boy looks like?" The man turned around to the boy and replied, "You say he looks like somebody?" as he said these words he stopped.

The two people were Guo Jing and Huang Rong. That day they were at a restaurant searching for news of Huang Yaoshi, when they suddenly saw flames far away and after a while, a person in the street hurriedly said, "The Lu's mansion is on fire!" Huang Rong shivered as she remembered that Jiaxing's Lu's mansion belonged to Lu Zhanyuan, a fairly famous person in the wuxia world, and although they had never met, she had admired the name. In Jianghu many people had mentioned that Jiangnan has two Lu mansions. There are countless Lu mansions in Jiangnan, the two that the Wuxia members mentioned were the Lu

mansion by the Tai Lake and Jiaxing's Lu mansion. For Lu Zhanyuan to be mentioned in the same breath as Lu Chengfeng, he was surely not an ordinary person. After asking a few questions, it turned out it was Lu Zhanyuan's mansion that was being burned. The two hurried for the site but once they got there, the fire had died down, the mansion had been burnt down to the ground, a few bodies were found at the scene but they were burned beyond recognition.

Huang Rong said, "Something strange may have occurred."

Guo Jing asked, "What?"

Huang Rong replied, "Lu Zhanyuan is a fairly famous name in Jianghu, his wife Yuanjun is also a heroine of this generation. If the mansion caught fire, how come no one managed to escape? The only explanation is that an enemy of theirs had come to take their revenge."

Guo Jing thought this must be the reason and replied, "Yes, let us think, who the suspect can be?"

The two examined the site but found no traces of any evidence. Huang Rong suddenly saw something on one of the remaining walls and shouted, "Look, what's that?"

Guo Jing looked up and saw a few blood handprints on the wall; after being burned, the blood prints became more prominent. The wall collapsed and on the lower section were two prints. Guo Jing gathered himself and suddenly spurted out, "The Scarlet Serpent Deity!"

Huang Rong replied, "It must be her."

They had long heard of Li Mochou, the "Scarlet Serpent Deity". Her kung fu was high, and no one can compare with her poisonous ways. She was comparable to the one called

‘Western Poison’. She was in Jiangnan and it was a chance to track her down.

Guo Jing nodded his head, "People in Wulin have said she is extremely difficult to deal with, if we can find your father it would be good."

Huang Rong laughed and said, "The older they get, the less we have to worry."

Guo Jing said, "You're right. The more someone practices martial arts, the less work they have to do."

Huang Rong laughed and said, "You are modest Master Guo! I find the more I practice the worse I get."

The two laughed and joked, but secretly they were on the guard as well. They looked around, and by a pond they saw two “Soul Freezing Silver Needles”. One of the needles was half submerged in the pond, the ponds eighty or so gold fishes' white bellies were facing up. It was the deed of the poison of the needle. Huang Rong stuck out her tongue and broke off two pieces of twig from a tree and used it to fish the needle out, and then placed it in her gown sack. The two searched everywhere, and then saw the two eagles and eventually met the boy.

Guo Jing thought that the boy looked familiar, but at the time could not think of who he looks like. His nose suddenly picked up a strange scent, and sniffed a few more times and felt his brain start to smother. Huang Rong had already noticed this, and knew the origin was nearby. She turned around to search for the source and saw the male eagle had a wound on its left claw, and after a closer examination, the source of the scent was indeed from the wound. The two gulped, and carefully examined the wound, the skin was broken only slightly yet the leg had swollen to more than twice its size, the skin and flesh had started to rot. Guo Jing

thought, "What caused this wound, why is it so severe?" He suddenly saw the boy's hand was black and asked, "You've been poisoned as well?"

Huang Rong went over and took his hand and looked at this palm; she pulled up his sleeve and took out a knife and slit the boy's wrist to draw out the poison blood. Only to see that the blood flowing out was red. She thought this was strange and thought, "His palm's black and definitely has poison so why doesn't his blood have it? She didn't know that when the strange man had bestowed his skills to the boy, the poisoned blood had already flowed out of his fingertips, and the poison did not rise back. From her bag, she took out a "Nine Flower Jade Dew" pill, and said, "Swallow this." The boy took the pill, smelt it first and noticed a nice scent, and put it into his mouth. He felt a fragrance fill his mouth, the sweetness was incomparable. A cool clear air filled his "dan tian". Huang Rong took out another two pills and fed it to the two eagles.

Guo Jing was immersed in thought, but he still managed to whistle a tune. The boy heard his high tune and knew it wasn't easy; this gave him a surprise. Suddenly, a whistling sound came from afar, flocks of birds in the forest flew in all directions, and the branches of a nearby willow tree were shaking incessantly. As soon as the first song was finished, a second one followed, the sound of the two combined resonated and folded, herd of horses galloped hurriedly far away. Huang Rong knew that it was her father sending an invitation to Li Mochou for a battle. As the third whistle came, she filled her "dan tian" line, and followed the whistle with her own, Guo Jing's whistle was loud and spacious, and Huang Rong's was high and soaring. The two's whistles combined together was like a large fabulous bird and a small bird in a competition to see who can fly higher, as they flew the higher they got, the little bird not settling for being

behind the large bird. When the two were on Peach Blossom Island they refined and cultivated their internal strength, their internal energy had reached new levels. Right now, their sounds soared and resonated for many miles.

When the whistles reached the strange man, he quickened his steps, as he hurried to escape. When it reached the blue green-gowned man who was carrying Cheng Ying, he laughed and said, "You've finally arrived, this old man had better run to avoid getting caught."

Li Mochou was carrying Lu Wushuang by her side, hurrying in her escape when she suddenly heard the whistles; she halted in her tracks, and waved her fly whisk. She turned around and laughed coldly, "Hero Guo's name shakes through Wulin, and I must take a look to see if he lives up to his name." She then heard a clear, crisp whistle follow the last one, the two sounds superimposed on each other produced a sharp yet soft sound, the power of it was increased further. Li Mochou's heart shivered, she knew she had met a formidable foe; she thought about how the Guo couple swept Wulin, supporting each other, yet she was alone, her thoughts became grey, and sighed as she carried Lu Wushuang across her chest and ran away.

At that moment, Madam Wu supported her husband, taking her two children with her preparing to leave along with Ke Zhen'E. After the battle with Li Mochou, Ke Zhen'E was afraid that she would come back and harm Guo Fu; he wanted to take her to a safe place and hide for a while. When he heard the calls by the Guo couple he was glad and relieved. Guo Fu shouted out, "Father, mother!" and ran out. One old, one young followed the sounds of the whistles and hurriedly rushed to the Guo couple. Guo Fu threw herself onto Huang Rong and smiled as she said, "Mother, grandpa fought off an evil woman, his skills were unbelievable." Huang Rong knew she was lying but could only smile. Guo

Jing reprimanded her "Young children should always tell the truth." Guo Fu stuck out her tongue as she said, "Grandpa's skills are not good? How can he be your master?" Afraid that her father will scold her again, she ran on ahead and pointed to the boy saying, "You go pick some flowers for me and arrange it into a crown for me to wear!" The boy followed her. Guo Fu saw that his palm was black and said, "Your hand is disgusting, take the flowers you pick and cover your smell with it."

The boy calmly said, "Who wants to play with you?" and took large steps as he walked away.

Guo Jing said, "Little brother, don't run. The poison in your body has not fully been removed; when it reacts again it will be painful."

The little boy wished that he would mind his own business, and after being spoken to like that by Guo Fu, he carried on walking ahead, ignoring the man's words. Guo Jing walked in front of him and said, "Why have you contracted poison? Let me cure it for you first, it won't be long."

The boy replied, "I don't recognize you, what had this got to do with you." He increased his speed and wanted to walk past Guo Jing. Guo Jing saw that the boy's face seemed to carry a noble air, his face looking like someone he has met before, his feelings were aroused and asked the boy, "What's your surname?" The boy gave him a glance and walked around him, still wanting to get away. Guo Jing caught his wrist. The boy couldn't shake himself free, and formed a fist with his left hand punching Guo Jing in the stomach. Guo Jing just smiled, and took no notice of the punch. The boy wanted pull back his fist, but his fist seemed to be held within the man's stomach, unable to move. His face became red, and pulled back with all his strength until his arm ached, but he couldn't over come the pull of the man's

stomach. The man smiled and said, "If you tell me what your name is, then I'll let you go."

The boy replied, "My surname is Ni, first names Laozi, now let me go." Guo Jing was disappointed with the answer and relaxed his abdomen, he didn't realize that the boy had tricked him and called himself, "I'm your father". The boy's hand was now free and thought, "You've got great ability, your father can't compare to his good son." Huang Rong saw the boy had a devious expression on his face, and still felt that he looked like someone from the past so tested him again.

She smiled and said, "Little brother, if you are my husband's father that means you are mine too." She stretched out her hand and held the boy's neck from behind. The boy felt the hold came from an extremely strong force, and tried desperately to pull away. Huang Rong loosened her grip, the boy got a glimpse of the sky before falling over. Guo Fu clapped and laughed. The boy hid his embarrassment and got up, and took a few steps back, and swore at her. Huang Rong was already standing in front of him, she held his shoulder and looked him in the eye and gently said, "Your surname is Yang, first name Guo. Your mother's surname is Mu, isn't that correct?" The boy was indeed named Yang Guo, and somehow Huang Rong had called it out, the shock was too much for him, he felt pain in his chest, the poison in his hand had returned, his brain started to get blurry and he fainted.

Huang Rong managed to hold onto him. Guo Jing pushed him a few times using his internal energy, but his eyes did not open, his teeth had bitten his tongue, his mouth full of red blood, and he didn't wake up. Guo Jing was happy and worried at the same time and said, "He, he is brother Yang Kang's son." Huang Rong saw that Yang Guo's poison was

serious and gently said, "Let's first get to an inn, then we'll mix up some medicine for him."

Huang Rong had seen that the boy looked extremely like Yang Kang, and remembered that she had met Mu Nianci in an inn. When she held the back of Mu's neck, instead of pushing forward, Mu pushed backward. This was a secret skill of Hong Qigong's. It was part of his circulating air and practicing energy method. If the boy was Mu Nianci's son, then their kung fu would be the same. Huang Rong was a disciple of Hong Qigong's and knew the arts of her master well, so she tested him, and indeed he was who she thought he was.

Guo Jing carried the boy, and along with Ke Zhen'E, Huang Rong, Guo Fu and the pair of eagles returned to the inn. Huang Rong wrote out an herb list, and gave it to the inn's waiter to go to the medicine shop and pick them out. However the herbs she picked out were all rare, even in a place like Jiaying the shops did not have them. Guo Jing saw that Yang Guo was still unconscious and was extremely worried about him. Huang Rong knew that after Yang Kang had died, her husband had felt responsible, and now he had found his son, he would be ecstatic. But now the boy had contracted a lethal poison, his life in the balance, and said, "We will go and gather the herbs ourselves."

Guo Jing knew that if there is a glimmer of hope to cure the poison, she would try to reassure him but he saw her expression was one of worry. He ordered Guo Fu that she mustn't run around as she pleased, and the couple went off to gather the herbs and grasses.

Yang Guo slept quietly without waking until it was night. Ke Zhen'E checked up on him a few times, using his hands to feel him. The poison on his darts could not compare to that of the "Soul Freezing Silver Needles" and so could not use

the antidote that he had. He was afraid that Guo Fu would slip away, so he made sure she was asleep.

Yang Guo was unconscious for a long time when suddenly someone placed a palm on his chest and used their internal strength to wake him up. He slowly woke up, and opened his eyes. He saw a flash of black, as someone escaped out of the window. His strength slowly returned as he supported himself on a table by the window so he could have a look. He saw a man on the roof overhang of the room and the man was upside down. It was the strange man who earlier wanted him to call him father. He was moving about, and could drop down to the room when he pleased.

Yang Guo was surprised and said, "It's you."

The strange man replied, "Why aren't you calling me father?"

Yang Guo said, "Father!" but thought, "You are my son, I'll just turn the roles around and call you father for now."

The man was very pleased and said, "Come up here." Yang Guo climbed out of the window and leapt onto the roof. But his body was weak due to the poison, he wasn't at full strength and his fingers weren't able to grab the roof edge. As he was falling he called out, "Ah!"

The man stretched out his hand and grabbed the boy's back and gently placed him on the rooftop. He turned upright, and was about to say something when he heard someone from a room to the west blow out a candle. He felt that someone had discovered him and so he carried Yang Guo and hurriedly escaped. Ke Zhen'E had leapt on the roof, but there wasn't a trace of anyone.

The strange man carried Yang Guo outside the small town and reached a piece of uncultivated land and put him down.

He said, "Use the method I taught you to force some of the poison out." Yang Guo got into position, and after a short while, a few drops of poisoned blood came out, his chest became relaxed and more comfortable.

The strange man said, "You are a clever boy, and can use it straight away just after one lesson. You are even better than my real son." "Ai...Son...ah!" He thought about his deceased son, his eyes became watery as he stroked Yang Guo's head, and let out a sigh.

Yang Guo had never had a father in his life and his mother passed away due to illness when he was eleven years old. Before she died, she told him that his father died in Jiaxing's Iron Spear monastery, and instructed him to cremate her and bury her outside the monastery. After he had taken care of his mother's burial, he wandered around Jiaxing and lived in the old kiln, in poverty. Mu Nianci had taught Yang Guo some of her family's kung fu but her skills weren't great, and Yang Guo at the time was young and so couldn't learn much. Within these few years, Yang Guo had made trouble and enemies, and although he had never met the strange man before, the man had treated him well and the feelings were real. He was touched and leapt up and grabbed the man around his neck and called out, "Father, father!" Ever since he was three years old, he always wished he had a loving father. Sometimes in his dreams he would see a heroic and loving father but when he woke up his father was gone and because of this he would cry for a while. His wish for many years had come true, and buried within the calls of 'father' were real feelings of joy and respect, not the calls of lies and deceit.

Yang Guo was very emotional right now; the strange man was even more happy and emotional inside. When they first met, Yang Guo was forced to call him father to save his life, and didn't want him as a father, now both of them had the

same feelings, they were like a real father and son, but he felt that the man had something on his mind. His feelings were so strong that he was willing to die for him if need be. The strange man was laughing and crying at the same time and said, "Good son, good son, obedient son. Call me father again." Yang Guo called him twice, and then leaned on his body.

The man smiled and said, "Good son, come here, I will teach you all the martial arts I know." As he said this he dropped down and made three strange noises and then pushed his hands out. The sound of an explosion was produced, the earth in front of him rose up like a violent grey mudflow and then the dirt scattered. Yang Guo looked on with his mouth open, his tongue out, shocked and asked, "What is that skill called, can I learn it?"

The strange man replied, "Its called "Ge Ma" stance (Toad Stance), if you work hard, you will be able to learn it."

Yang Guo said, "If I learn it then no one can bully me again?"

The man's eyebrows raised and said, "If anyone bullies my son then I'll rip their skin and tear their muscles."

The strange man was the "Western Poison" Ouyang Feng.

Ever since Huang Rong had made him go mad at the second Mount Hua tournament, he has traveled, for these last ten years, to the edge of the world and always asked one question, "Who am I?" Whenever he is near a lush land, he would always linger on trying to find the answer to his question; these past months he has been staying in Jiaxing. These few years he has been practicing the "Contrary Nine Yin Manual". His internal energy has been increasing to new levels, his mind had become clearer, but he was still mad. His memories were slowly coming back but he still could not remember who he was.

Right now, Ouyang Feng was passing on the formula to practice "Toad Stance" to Yang Guo. The "Toad Stance" is one of the top skills in the martial arts world, the changes refined, mysterious and clever, and its internal energy aspect hard to beat; but if it is practiced wrong, not only will the body be harmed, but the practitioner will expel blood and die. Because of this, he didn't even pass it on to his son when he was alive. At this moment in time, he was touched and added to the fact he wasn't mentally clear, he couldn't differentiate between important and dangerous things. He didn't take this into consideration and taught the skill to his stepson.

Yang Guo does not have a good martial arts foundation, though he learnt the formula to the skill and memorized it, would he be able to understand the meanings behind the words?

Though he was extremely clever, there were phrases which he didn't understand. Ouyang Feng had taught him for half a day now, and when he listened to Yang Guo's explanation and it wasn't making sense, he had another mental attack and wanted to hit him. But when he saw his handsome and cute face in the moonlight, it reminded him of his own son when he was younger, and so he lowered his hand.

"You're struggling. Go and rest, I'll carry on tomorrow."

After Guo Fu had ridiculed him because of his hand, he had a dislike for her family and said, "I want to follow you, I don't want to return."

Ouyang Feng didn't understand his own problems but he was aware of the world's problems and said, "I have some trouble with my mind, I'm afraid I can't take care of you if you follow me. You return first and when I've solved one problem I will come and collect you, we won't part, okay?"

After the death of his mother he has never talked to someone as if they were family and grabbed his hand and said, "Collect me soon."

Ouyang Feng nodded and said, "I will secretly follow you, wherever you go I'll be there. If someone bullies you, I'll break their ribs into seventy or eighty pieces." He then picked up Yang Guo and returned him to the inn.

Ke Zhen'E had gone to check on Yang Guo and found he wasn't there. He searched the entire inn but still couldn't find him; he became extremely concerned. He checked on Yang Guo's room again; Yang Guo had returned. He was about to ask where Yang Guo had been when he heard the wind generated by someone passing along the rooftop. He knew two people had passed along on the roof, their skills extremely high, he picked up Guo Fu and then placed her by his side. He went over to the window with his iron walking staff, afraid that the two people were enemies; he listened carefully and heard that the wind created by the two people was coming closer and eventually had arrived on the roof above them.

"Did you see who he was?"

"Strange, strange, was it him?" replied the other person.

It was Guo Jing and Huang Rong.

Ke Zhen'E was relieved and opened the door to let them in. Huang Rong said, "Senior master, did anything happen?"

"Nothing," replied Ke Zhen'E.

Huang Rong turned to Guo Jing and said, "Did we recognize the wrong person?"

Guo Jing replied shaking his head, "No, I'm ninety percent certain it was him."

"Who was it?" asked Ke Zhen'E.

Huang Rong tugged on Guo Jing, trying to tell him not to say. But Guo Jing didn't dare to lie to his master and said, "Ouyang Feng."

Ke Zhen'E despised this man, as soon as he heard his name his complexion changed and quietly said, "Ouyang Feng? Isn't he dead?"

Guo Jing said, "When we came back from picking the medicine, we saw someone on the roof, the person's movements were quick and strange, when we went to take a look, the person had already gone. It looked like Ouyang Feng."

From the description, Ke Zhen'E knew it must be Ouyang Feng and no one else. Guo Jing was concerned about Yang Guo so grabbed a candle and went over to the bed. He saw that Yang Guo's face was red, his breathing relaxed and sleeping peacefully. He was pleasantly surprised and called out, "Rong'er, he's better!" Yang Guo was really awake and he was just pretending to be asleep, he had secretly listened in and now knew his stepfather was called Ouyang Feng. The three of them were extremely concerned about him, and now they were all relieved and pleased.

Huang Rong took a closer look, and was surprised, before his arm's poison had returned but now after just a few hours, the black colour of the poison had faded; the poison seems to have disappeared. She was greatly surprised by this. She and Guo Jing had searched for medicine all day, but could not gather everything they wanted, so they decided to return with what they had and give it to him for the time being.

The next day, Guo Jing, Huang Rong and Ke Zhen'E with the two small ones headed west from Jiaxing, intending to return

to Peach Blossom Island, and firstly cure Yang Guo's poison before deciding to do anything else. That night they were in another inn, Ke Zhen'E and Yang Guo were in one room, the Guo family in another. The Guo couple slept into the middle of the night when suddenly they heard a noise on the rooftop. They heard Ke Zhen'E call out through the wall, and jumped out of the window. The couple quickly jumped out of the window only to see on the rooftop Ke Zhen'E was fighting barehanded with someone, the enemy was tall and had long hands, it was Ouyang Feng. Guo Jing swallowed, frightened that Ouyang Feng would take his master's life in one move and he jumped up onto the roof to help. Only to hear Ke Zhen'E shout and fall off the roof. Guo Jing flew over to him, and before Ke Zhen'E head had met the ground, he lightly caught him from behind and gently placed him gently down on the ground.

He asked, "Senior Master, are you okay?"

"I'm not dead yet. Go and fight Ouyang Feng." Ke Zhen'E replied.

"Yes," replied Guo Jing and he jumped onto the roof.

At the time, Huang Rong was fighting with her palms, the palms like a flying dance. It has been ten years since she has seen her old enemy, and right now they were fighting ferociously. Her internal energy has improved tremendously over the last few years, her internal energy is now very forceful, the palms she were using were changing mysteriously and cleverly; after ten moves, Ouyang Feng didn't gain any advantage.

Guo Jing called out, "Mr. Ouyang, how have you been."

Ouyang Feng replied, "What did you say? What did you call me?" His face changed, in the fight with Huang Rong he did not attack, he had a feeling that the two words 'Ouyang' was

significant to him. Guo Jing was about to say something when Huang Rong interrupted as she saw that he wasn't clear about who he was and said, "You are called Zhao Qiansunli, Zhou Wuchenwang!"

Ouyang Feng listened, "I'm called Zhao Qiansunli, Zhou Wuchenwang?"

Huang Rong replied, "Correct, your nickname is Zuo Fengchengchuwei, Jiang Shenhanyang." Huang Rong had randomly picked out some surnames. Ouyang Feng was originally confused but after hearing her call him many names, he scratched his head and asked, "Who are you? Who am I?"

Suddenly someone behind shouted out, "You are the old animal that killed my five brothers." Before the sentence was finished, an iron walking staff came out, it was Ke Zhen'E. When Ouyang Feng knocked him off the roof, he wasn't hurt and went into his room to get his iron walking staff to battle him again. Guo Jing shouted out, "Careful master!" Ke Zhen'E smashed down his iron walking staff on Ouyang Feng's back but he didn't move, he made a strange noise and the walking staff fiercely came back out at Ke Zhen'E. Ke Zhen'E couldn't hold on, and let go of his walking staff and fell into the courtyard. Although Guo Jing knew that his master was falling, it wasn't going to be serious but Ouyang Feng had used his back to launch a lethal attack so he shouted, "Watch out!" His left leg bent, his right palm circled, and then pushed out; it was the "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms" 'Overcoming the Dragon with Regret' (Kang Long You Hui). He had practiced this particular stance night and day without a break, when he first learned the stance its power was obvious, but after ten years of practicing, it was now at a flawless level. When he first unleashed it, it looked light and fragile but when it meets an obstruction, it will be able to unleash its force in thirteen

levels, each level stronger than the last one. It will move the unyielding, there is no force it can't overcome. He had incorporated ideas in the "Nine Yin Manual" into the palms and modified them, like Hong Qigong had modified the palms years ago, although it was only the stances and not the mysterious energy behind it.

Ouyang Feng had just knocked Ke Zhen'E off the roof when he suddenly felt a gust of wind throwing itself at him, although the wind wasn't strong, it caused his breathing to be uneven, and knew it wasn't something ordinary so quickly crouched down and pushed out his two palms, it was his most refined skill the "Toad Stance". They exchanged three palms; both of them were hit once. Guo Jing's palm strength increased; the next level higher than the last, like a torrent of waves throwing it self forwards. Ouyang Feng made two 'Ka Ka' noises, his body getting lower, as if he was going to fall down any minute. Guo Jing's palms were getting stronger, his counteracting strength also increased.

The two haven't exchanged moves for over ten years, now they meet again in Jiangnan, they must test each other to see how they have advanced over the years. Long ago at the Mount Hua tournament, Guo Jing couldn't match Ouyang Feng, but since then he has refined his internal energy, his skills have vastly improved. Ouyang Feng has been practicing the "Contrary Nine Yin Manual" and got what he deserved. However, one phrase real and one phrase fake, eventually he produced a learnable copy from the fake and up until now, Guo Jing was fighting him to a draw, unable to distinguish who has the upper hand. Huang Rong wanted her husband to win by himself so stood to one side and didn't interfere.

The roofs in south were very different to the roofs in the north. The roofs in the north had to support the amassed snow in winter, the roofs were solid. In the south it was wet

weather that had to be addressed, the roofs were covered in tiles, with removing rain in mind. Guo Jing and Ouyang Feng were matching internal energy through their palms, and braced their legs, and after a moment, the sound of something creaking was heard below their feet, with one sound followed by another, the beams of the roof snapped, a hole was made in the roof as the two of them fell in. Huang Rong gulped and jumped down the hole and followed them, only to see the two still competing, their feet supported by some more beams, but they were above one of the inn's guests. The guest was sleeping, how would he know the roof was falling in, at that moment his legs broke and he was screaming out in pain. Guo Jing didn't want to hurt any innocent bystanders and so didn't use his legs for support, but Ouyang Feng didn't care if anyone dies because of them. The two of them were equally matched but because Guo Jing didn't use the beams as support, his palms had no foundation to rely on. He was on his way to losing. He used one hand to push against Ouyang Feng's two palms, he channeled all his strength in his right hand, his left hand was empty, there was no strength for it to use. Huang Rong saw her husband was being pushed backwards, although it was only half an inch or so, he was losing.

She shouted, "Hey, Zhang Sanlisi, Hu Tuwangba, watch out," and aimed a light palm on Ouyang Feng's shoulder. Though this palm was light, it was from the "Descending Brave Divine Sword Palm" (Luo Ying Shen Jian Zhang) skill, when it lands, the internal energy will spread through the internal organs. Though Ouyang Feng is one of the most powerful martial artists of his time, he would still suffer from this blow. Ouyang Feng heard her call out weird surnames at him and was distracted for a second. As he saw the palm come in, he pushed his two palms, forcing Guo Jing back another inch, and in a flash he held onto Huang Rong's shoulder, his five fingers like a hook, trying to tear a piece of her flesh off.

When this move came out, the three of them swallowed simultaneously. Ouyang Feng felt severe pain in his fingers; she was wearing soft armour with needles, he couldn't loosen his hand. At this time, Guo Jing's palm's power increased again, and Ouyang Feng pushed out a palm to counteract this, in the midst of this danger he used all his strength. After a clashing sound, both of them moved back, the room was full of dust and dirt as the walls collapsed.

When the two clashed palms, it was under the shroud of night and the both of them could not see each other clearly, the large force of the "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms" and the "Toad Stance" hit each other on the shoulder. The two of them were sent through opposite walls; half of the roof fell in. Huang Rong had suffered a blow but she wasn't hurt although she had a fright and made her flush. In the midst of all this she flew out of the room before the roof collapsed. She saw Guo Jing and Ouyang Feng five feet apart motionless; the both of them had suffered internal injuries. Huang Rong didn't attack the enemy and instead just walked over by her husband's side to guard him. The both of them shut their eyes to try to control their chi, but after two stuttering noises both of them spat out a mouthful of blood.

Ouyang Feng said, "The "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms", good stuff, good stuff!" A mad laugh followed as he ran away, in a blink of an eye he was nowhere to be seen.

Presently, the inn was in the midst of chaos. Huang Rong knew that they couldn't stay here any longer, and from the hand of Ke Zhen'E grabbed her daughter and said, "Master, you carry brother Jing and follow us." Ke Zhen'E put Guo Jing on his shoulder and step by step slowly headed north. After a while, Huang Rong suddenly remembered Yang Guo, she didn't know where he had gone to, but she was more concerned about her husband's injuries so left this matter

until later on. Guo Jing understood, but because of the injury caused by Ouyang Feng, he couldn't speak. He breathed evenly while on Ke Zhen'E's back, circulating his energy to unravel his veins, after they had travel about seven, eight miles, his veins had all been cleared and said, "Master, I'm okay." He put Guo Jing down and said, "You've recovered?"

Guo Jing shook his head and said, "The "Toad Stance" is a great skill!" He saw his daughter supporting herself on her mother's shoulder sleeping peacefully, and said, "Where's Guo'er?" Ke Zhen'E had forgotten about Yang Guo, and struggled for words.

Huang Rong said, "Don't worry, first we'll find a place to rest. Then I'll go back and look for him."

The sky was beginning to brighten, and under the moon they recognized a house by the forest. Guo Jing said, "My injury is not serious, we'll go find him together."

Huang Rong frowned and said, "That boy is extremely clever, you don't have to be too concerned." As they said this they arrived at the house, suddenly they saw someone come out from behind the white wall and then was about to return again. Huang Rong went over there and grabbed the person, it was Yang Guo.

He laughed and said, "Auntie," and carried on saying, "You guys arrived? I've been waiting for a long time now."

Huang Rong couldn't explain but she suspected something and replied, "Fine, follow us."

Yang Guo laughed, and followed. Guo Fu opened her eyes, and asked, "Where have you been?"

Yang Guo replied, "I went to catch some crickets to see them fight. It was great fun."

"What's so much fun about that?" Guo Fu said.

"Huh, what's not fun about that? A large cricket was fighting with an old cricket. When the old one lost, two little crickets came to help out, three versus one. The large cricket jumped around, kicked out a foot there, and bit one over there, it was extremely powerful." When he reached this point, he didn't add anything else. Guo Fu had listened carefully and asked, "Then what happened?"

Yang Guo said, "You said it's not fun, so why are you interested?"

Guo Fu touched her nail, and angrily turned her head away, ignoring him. Huang Rong could tell that his words were praising Ouyang Feng and ridiculing the couple and Ke Zhen'E. She said, "Tell Auntie, who won in the end?"

Yang Guo laughed and said, "Just when things were getting interesting, you came along, the cricket jumped away."

Huang Rong thought: "Like father like son," but kept her suspicions of him to herself.

After a while, they arrived at a village. Huang Rong went to a large residence to look for the owner. The owner was very hospitable, when they heard someone was hurt, they quickly prepared two rooms for the guests. Guo Jing ate three bowls of rice, and then sat on the couch, closed his eyes and meditated. Huang Rong saw that her husband was resting, and managed to relax, sitting next to her husband guarding him. She thought about Yang Guo in all the situations they have been in, and felt although he was young, there are a lot of strange things that couldn't be explained, and when he was asked for detailed explanations, half of it was a lie. She made a mental note to herself to pay extra attention to Yang Guo and be wary of him. She'd had a tiresome day, and after a meal, she went to bed.

Yang Guo and Ke Zhen'E were sharing the same room, and in the middle of the night he quietly got up. When he heard Ke Zhen'E snoring in his deep sleep, he quietly opened the door, he slipped out of the room and went over to the wall, and to a Cinnamomum Cassia tree, climbed it, and leapt over the wall slipping away. The dogs outside the wall picked up a human scent, and started to bark. Yang Guo was prepared; he took out a piece of bone out of his bag, and threw it to them. The dogs bit onto the bone, and stopped their barking.

Yang Guo checked his bearings, and headed southwest, and in seven, eight li, he had reached the Iron Spear Monastery. He pushed open the doors and called out, "Father, I'm here!" He heard a noise coming in from within. It was Ouyang Feng. Yang Guo was happy, he went inside and felt out a table, and found candle. He lit it and saw Ouyang Feng reclining on top of some statues, his body unwell, and his breathing weak. He and Guo Jing have suffered similar injuries, but because Guo Jing has amassed an abundant amount of rich internal energy over the years, he is able to recover very rapidly; Ouyang Feng is closer to old age, his energy isn't as good.

What had happened on the previous night was that Ouyang Feng had come again for Yang Guo, but Ke Zhen'E was awake in the room, so they started to fight. Afterwards when Huang Rong and Guo Jing came and joined in the battle, Yang Guo was watching. Eventually both Ouyang Feng and Guo Jing had suffered injuries, and so Ouyang Feng escaped. In the chaos, everyone forgot about Yang Guo, and he sneaked away after Ouyang Feng. At first Ouyang Feng was moving at a fast pace, Yang Guo could not catch up, but Ouyang Feng's injury was agitated, moving was hard. Yang Guo eventually caught up and took him aside to rest. Yang Guo knew that if he didn't return Huang Rong and Ke Zhen'E

would come and look for him, and feared his stepfather's life would be in danger. So he arranged with Ouyang Feng to meet in the Iron Spear Monastery. Both were familiar with the monastery so knew where it was. When Yang Guo was guarding the road, Guo Jing and the others had come up behind them. Only now, in the middle of the night, was he able to come and check. Yang Guo took seven or eight buns out of his bag and handed them over to Ouyang Feng, "Father, eat something." Ouyang Feng had nothing to eat for the whole day, he was frightened he would meet one of his enemies, and was stuck in the monastery all day. He ate a few of the buns and was conscious for a while and asked, "Where are you and the others at?" Yang Guo told him everything.

Ouyang Feng said, "The one named Guo suffered from one of my palms, it would be difficult for him to recover within seven days. His wife will have to look after him, she won't leave his side, and I'm worried about that Ke old man. If he doesn't come tonight, he will be here tomorrow. It's a pity I don't have an ounce of energy in me. Hmm...I think I did kill his brothers but I don't know whether is it four or five." As he said this he let out a cough.

Yang Guo sat on the floor, his hand on his cheeks, many thoughts going through his little mind and suddenly thought to himself, "I've got it, I'll put some sharp objects on the floor first, so when the old man comes he'll suffer some injuries."

He then went over to the table with the candles on it, and tipped out the candles and collected the holders, and placed them by the entrance, and then closed the entrance, and emptied an old incense holder and placed it on top of the door. He looked around, trying to think of more traps for any enemies, and saw a large bell hung in the room. Three people could not move the bell; it weighed about a

thousand kilos. On the bell's neck were an extremely thick metal hook and a large wooden trestle system. The Iron Spear monastery was old and hasn't been maintained for a long time, but the large bell and system was undamaged. He thought, "If that old man comes, I will climb into the bell, he won't find me." He held the candle holders and was looking for sharp objects in the hall, when he suddenly heard a 'du du du' sound from the road, caused by a metal staff, and knew it was Ke Zhen'E and was going to blow out the candles when he thought, "That old man is blind, I don't need to blow it out." The sounds came closer, Ouyang Feng sat up and wanted to transfer all of his body's strength into his right hand, wanting to attack first and cause a violent death. Yang Guo turned the metal carvings on the candle holder up, and guarded Ouyang Feng and thought, although my martial arts skills are low, I will do my best to help stepfather to rid of the old man.

Ke Zhen'E knew that Ouyang Feng had a serious injury and would not be able to travel far; the Iron Spear Monastery was close by and an old hangout of his. He won't stay at an inn or at a family's shelter; he would hide in the monastery. He thought about his five brothers dying at his hands and today he has a chance to get revenge, would he be able to say no? In the midst of the night he woke up and called out, "Guo'er, Guo'er!" and when he heard no reply, he thought he was sound asleep. He didn't check and hurriedly went out. The two dogs outside the house were busy gnawing on the bone that Yang Guo threw at them and didn't bark when they saw him. He slowly made his way to the monastery, and listened carefully. Indeed there was the sound of breathing within the monastery. He shouted out, "Old animal, old man Ke is here, if you've got balls, come out now." As he said this he slammed his walking staff onto the ground. Ouyang Feng was afraid that he will lose the chi in his "dan tian" and didn't move.

Ke Zhen'E called out a few times, and stabbed his walking staff outside the monastery doors. He entered only to hear a clattering noise from above as the incense holder fell, his left foot stepped onto the candleholders metal protrusions and pierced his boots. Ke Zhen'E didn't understand and waved his metal walking stick about, when suddenly there was an extremely loud noise deafening him, he knocked away the incense holder and it rolled onto the floor, luckily the metal protrusions didn't pierce his foot. By his side were some more of those candleholders, one of them was piercing his shoulder. He pulled it out with his left hand and blood poured. He didn't dare to be careless anymore and listened for Ouyang Feng's breathing. His foot sliding across the ground, getting closer step by step, until he was three meters away. He held out his iron walking staff and said, "Old animal, what have you got to say today?" Ouyang Feng had already transferred all his energy into his right hand, when the opposition raises his weapon he would send out a palm, and take Ke Zhen'E with him. Ke Zhen'E knew that his enemy had suffered a serious injury, but didn't know how serious, he held his ground waiting for the opponent to move first; then he would know how much strength he has. The two of them stood there silently, motionless. Ke Zhen'E could hear his breathing was heavy, his mind suddenly filled with the voices of his stepbrothers Zhu Cong, Han Bao Ju, Nan Xi Ren and others. The voices urged him to act, he couldn't resist and with a loud shout, unleashed "King Qin's Whipping Stone" (qin wang bian shi), sending the iron walking staff smashing downwards.

Ouyang Feng moved liked lightning, wanting to strike out his palm, but as he moved his arm half an inch he couldn't hold on and fell down to the floor. He heard the a loud noise, sparks flying everywhere, the iron walking staff smashing down on the bricks of the floor. Ke Zhen'E missed with his first move, and raised his weapon again, and struck out in

the direction of Ouyang Feng. The other day, Ouyang Feng just lightly pushed back and managed to force the iron walking staff out of his hand, and forced him to leap over the roof. But today Ouyang Feng's body was weak. He couldn't even use an ounce of his strength; he could only roll on the floor, trying to avoid the strikes. Ke Zhen'E used the "Dropping the Demon" set of strokes, with each stance faster than the last. Ouyang Feng was struggling to avoid the strokes, and eventually was hit by the "Concealed Medicine Poke" (Chu Fu Yao Cha) on the left shoulder.

Yang Guo was listening from the side, and couldn't hide his anguish, he wanted to help his stepfather, but with his level of martial arts, he would just be sending himself to his death. Ke Zhen'E managed to strike Ouyang Feng again; this time on the body. Ouyang Feng deserved what he was getting today, but his internal energy was deep. Though he had no power to attack, he could still avoid and parry some attacks. Only superficial injuries were apparent on him, his joints and his internal organs were still unharmed. Ke Zhen'E was slightly surprised, and thought to himself, that old animal's ability is certainly not simple, every time when it seems like I'm about to hit him, he manages to slip away. He manages to dissipate ninety percent of the power in my hits. If I utilize a soft type of attack, he won't be able to dodge. He then transferred his energy into his staff, and attacked his head. Ouyang Feng moved his head and managed to avoid the attacks for a few times but all of a sudden, he was trapped by the walking staff's wind, and he suffered a blow on the head. He managed to keep a hold of his life.

By luck he found himself within grasping range of Ke Zhen'E and grabbed his chest. Ke Zhen'E moved his walking staff out of reach of the enemy. He could only retaliate with his hands. The both of them rolled down on the floor together. Ouyang Feng didn't dare release his hands, and held on

tighter. His left hand reached for his waist, he felt something solid and reached out to grab it. It was a knife. It was Zhang Ah Sheng (One of Ke Zhen'E's stepbrothers) weapon, the slaughtering cow blade, however contrary to its name; it can't actually be used to slaughter cows. The knife can chop gold and break jade; its sharpness cannot be compared. After Cheng Ahsheng was killed by Chen Xuanfeng in the plains of Mongolia, Ke Zhen'E has kept the knife by his side to remind himself of him, and it never left him. Ouyang Feng went closer in to his body and snatched the knife out; he twisted his left arm, and aimed to pierce his enemy's side. As the knife was about to enter, Ke Zhen'E released his staff, and punched Ouyang Feng with his right hand a few times. Ouyang Feng was dazed, and waved the knife in the direction of the enemy. Ke Zhen'E heard the wind of the knife, and dodged away, only to hear a 'dang' sound, the sound didn't die down; the knife had struck the hall's large bell. Although this thrust by Ouyang Feng didn't carry much force, the knife's blade was extremely sharp, and caused it to quiver.

Yang Guo was standing next to the bell, the tip of the knife was heading for his cheeks. Yang Guo was frightened, his heart jumping to his throat, and quickly scrambled on top of the bell. After this move, Ouyang Feng went behind the bell. The bell's ringing had not diminished so Ke Zhen'E could not hear the breathing sounds. He went to the side and tried to pick up the sounds. The moonlight shone on the hall in the monastery; his hair was a mess, and he was leaning on the staff listening, his appearance frightening. Yang Guo saw what had happened and reached out for the knife, and then thrust it at the bell, causing a loud 'dang' sound, covering their breathing. Ke Zhen'E heard where the sound came from and headed in that direction. Ouyang Feng was still behind the bell. Ke Zhen'E stuck out his walking staff, Ouyang Feng evaded it.

The staff struck the bell and caused another loud deafening noise. Yang Guo felt his eardrums starting to hurt. Ke Zhen'E understood, and didn't aim for the bell. The ringing sound had not disappeared when another noise came from behind, getting clearer. Ouyang Feng was concerned, although Guo Jing is hurt, if the ringing continues, Huang Rong would eventually come and help. While the sound of the bell was deafening, he would take the chance to lightly step away and escape from the back of the hall. But Ke Zhen'E had very sensitive hearing, even with the loud ringing noise; he could still distinguish between light sounds, and heard the steps of Ouyang Feng. He knocked the bell with his staff, to lure out Ouyang Feng; when he is out in the open, he would attack his upper body with his walking staff. Although Ouyang Feng strength is weak at the moment, he has experienced a lifetime of storms and squalls (troubles and battles), how would he not know the tactics and tricks used in battle? When he saw Ke Zhen'E's right shoulder was raised, he knew what was going on, before the iron walking staff was raised, he moved back behind the bell. After he had suffered the serious injury, Ouyang Feng had already found it hard to move; though he has developed a profound level of internal energy in the last ten years, in this life-threatening situation he was unable to call upon it.

Ke Zhen'E called out, "Even if I don't kill you, you are going to die," and went over to the bell. Yang Guo saw the two circling around the bell, if this is kept up, his stepfather will definitely weaken. He suddenly thought of something, and climbed up on top of the bell and waved his hands about, trying to signal with his hands. Ouyang Feng was preoccupied with his enemy and didn't see this. Only after two more circles did he see Yang Guo, his hands pointing to the floor and telling him to move away. He didn't understand what he meant, but if he wanted him to move away, he must have a plan so he hurried move out the way. Ke Zhen'E

didn't move, he first needed to hear which direction his enemy moved in. Yang Guo took off his shoes and threw them to the back of the hall, making two thud sounds. Ke Zhen'E was baffled; he had heard Ouyang Feng was moving towards the doors so how come there was a noise at the back of the hall? When Ke Zhen'E was distracted, Yang Guo grasped the 'Slaughter Cow' knife, and with all his strength chopped at the wooden beam holding the large bell up. The beam was thick, Yang Guo was weak, the precious blade sharp; could he chop the beam in half? However the metal bell was extremely heavy, and after a few chops by the blade, the beam could not support the bell any longer. A creaking sound followed and the beam snapped, the large bell generated a wind as it fell, heading straight down on the Ke Zhen'E's head.

Ke Zhen'E had already heard the wind generated above him, thinking it was strange. The large bell fell down, he couldn't escape but the bell landed straight down on the iron walking staff, the staff held up the bell. As the bell was hindered he took this chance and slipped out of the way. He then heard a metallic snapping noise, and the metal walking staff snapped in half. The bell tipped over and rolled along the ground, hitting Ke Zhen'E in the shoulder, and flinging him out of the hall. He rolled around a few times and eventually landed on his nose, causing a nosebleed, his forehead also had a cut. Ke Zhen'E was blind and couldn't see anything, and didn't know what caused this. He was afraid that there was some strange being in the hall, and got up and escaped.

Ouyang Feng was by the side watching this, his heart able to relax and said, "What a pity, what a pity. Good son, very clever!"

Yang Guo climbed down, pleased with himself, and said, "That old man won't dare to come back."

Ouyang Feng shook his head saying, "He has a profound hatred for me, after a while, he will come back."

Yang Guo said, "We must go quickly."

Ouyang Feng shook his head again and said, "My injury is very serious, I won't be able to get far." He had escaped temporarily, but now he felt his bones were coming loose, he couldn't even move one step.

"What should we do?"

Ouyang Feng thought for a while and said, "There is a way. Break another bell's beam, and put me underneath it."

"How would you get out?" asked Yang Guo.

"I'll be meditating under the bell for seven days. After my strength has returned, I will be able to escape. If the old man returns within these seven days, he doesn't have the ability to lift the bell up. If Huang Rong doesn't come, I doubt if there is anyone that can break through. If Huang Rong does come, then the plan may fail."

Yang Guo thought carefully, and knew apart from this plan, nothing else will work. So he asked carefully again will he be able to escape from the bell without anyone's help and then said, "You won't have anything to eat within these seven days, right?"

Ouyang Feng said, "Go and find a basin, and fill it with clean water and place it beside me. There are still a few buns left. This will last for seven days if I eat them slowly."

Yang Guo went to the kitchen and found a large basin, and then filled it with clean water. He then placed it underneath another hung bell, and supported his stepfather directly underneath it, and sat him down.

Ouyang Feng said, "Son, follow the one called Guo. I will come and find you later on." Yang Guo agreed and climbed up to the bell, and broke the beam, sending the bell down, covering Ouyang Feng.

Yang Guo shouted out 'Father'. When he didn't hear a reply, he knew that he couldn't hear from within. As he was about to leave, he couldn't let go and went back to find another basin and filled it with water and placed it next to the bell. He then flipped over and placed his left hand in the bowl, and followed the method to reverse blood flow taught by Ouyang Feng to force some poison out. As he had just begun practicing this skill, he could only force out ten or so drops of blood before his head was full of sweat. Afterwards he ripped off some of the cloth from the statues, and then wrapped it around a rod, dipped it into the blood and water mixture, and covered the bell with it. He thought that if Ke Zhen'E does return, if he tries to move the bell, he would definitely be poisoned for sure.

Another thing that came to his attention was that his stepfather would definitely suffocate to death under the bell in seven days, so he would use the knife to dig out a brick tile beside the bell, and dig out a hole the size of a fist to allow the circulation of air. As he was digging the hole, the blade struck at another slab of stone underneath the tile and snapped. The blade was sharp, but it was very thin, and as he was digging the precious blade snapped. He didn't know the blade was precious, it wasn't his and he didn't feel it was a pity and threw the knife away. He knelt down on the ground and spoke through the opening, "Father, I'm going now. Come and collect me soon. Be careful when you come out, there is poison on the bell." Yang Guo bent his ear to the opening and hear Ouyang Feng replied weakly, "Good son, I'm not scared of poison; the poison should be scared of me. You be careful. I will definitely come back for you."

Yang Guo sat there for a while not willing to leave yet, but then started to hurry back; worried that Ke Zhen'E will notice that he has gone. When he got back to the room, he saw that Ke Zhen'E had not returned to the room, neither was he outside.

When morning came, he heard someone using a branch knocking on his door. He leapt out of his bed and opened the door. He saw it was Ke Zhen'E supporting himself on a wooden branch, his face grey and pale; he leant over into the room and fell onto the floor. Yang Guo noticed that his hands were black, he indeed did return to find Ouyang Feng. He was pleased that he had fallen into the trap that was left for him and pretended to be concerned, and shouted, "Grandpa Ke, what's the matter?"

Huang Rong and Guo Jing heard the shout, and hurried to see what the matter was; when they saw Ke Zhen'E on the floor they gasped. Guo Jing was still injured and struggled to walk, and so it was Huang Rong who supported Ke Zhen'E onto the bed. She asked, "First master, what did you do?"

Ke Zhen'E shook his head, and didn't reply. Huang Rong saw his hands were black and said angrily, "It was that Li bitch again. Brother Jing, I'll go and battle her." She tied her belt and walked out.

"It wasn't her," said Ke Zhen'E.

Huang Rong returned and asked, "Who was it then?"

Ke Zhen'E couldn't defeat a man who hasn't even got the strength to kill a chicken and it was he in return that was injured. It reflected badly on him. Ke Zhen'E was a stiff-necked man, it was what was called, 'tired of the ginger being old and not spicy', and didn't say a word about his wound. The two knew his behavior, if he wants to say, he will say it. The more they ask the angrier he'll get. It was lucky

that the poison only got on his skin; the potency wasn't that strong. He'll feel a bit light headed, after taking a "Nine Flower Jade Dew" pill, he'll be alright.

Huang Rong already planned what they should do; at the moment Guo Jing and Ke Zhen'E are hurt, Li Mochou's poison is trouble, so the children and two wounded must be sent to Peach Blossom Island. Later on she will find Li Mochou and settle this score. They spent the morning resting in the inn, in the afternoon they got on a boat and headed east.

Yang Guo was happy with the fact that Huang Rong did not attempt to find Ouyang Feng and thought, "Father was scared that Auntie Guo will come and search for him. Auntie Guo is such a beautiful lady, could it be that she is more powerful than Ke Zhen'E?"

The boat had traveled for half a day, the sky now getting dark. The boat anchored by the shore, the owners of the boat preparing the rice for supper. Guo Fu saw that Yang Guo had ignored her when she wanted to talk and argue with him. She sat by the window, and looked out. Under the shade of willow trees were two boys sobbing, it looked like the two Wu brothers. Guo Fu shouted out, "Hey, what are you doing there?"

Wu Xiuwen replied, "We are crying, can't you see?"

Guo Fu said, "What's the matter, did your mother beat you?"

Wu Xiuwen said, "My mum's dead!"

Huang Rong gasped when she heard this and leapt onto the shore. She saw the boys sobbing over their mother. Madam Wu's face was completely black, she had died a long time ago. Huang Rong asked for news of Wu Santong and Wu Dunru replied, "We don't know where he went."

Wu Xiuwen said, "Mother sucked the poison out of father, a lot of black blood came out. Father got better, while mother died. When father saw that mother had died, he went mad again. We called after him, but he ignored us and went away." They cried as they said this.

Huang Rong thought, "Madam Wu sacrificed herself for her husband, she is a great woman." She asked, "Are you hungry?" The boys nodded their heads. Huang Rong sighed and ordered the boat keeper to take the boys on board and feed them. When they reached a town, she bought a wooden coffin for Madam Wu, and prepared her body for it. She bought a piece of land and buried her at dawn. The brothers sobbed in front of the grave.

Guo Jing said, "Rong'er, the two boys have lost their parents, why don't we take them back to Peach Blossom Island and we'll care for them." Huang Rong agreed, and took the boys under her wing. They traveled on the boat until they reached the sea, and then hired a large boat and headed east, towards Peach Blossom Island.

End of chapter 2.

Chapter 3 - Seeking Tutelage at Mount Zhongnan

Translated by Noodles



Wu Xiu Wen jumped on Yang Guo's body. Held down by the two brothers, four fists rained down fiercely on him. Yang Guo bit his teeth and didn't make a sound. Guo Fu saw the beating was severe and was a little bit scared. But when she felt the red mark left by Yang Guo on her, she felt pleased and shouted out, "Hit him harder, harder!"

Guo Jing meditated on the boat, and after a few days, his energy has recovered by more than half. Huang Rong and Guo Jing raised the topic of Ouyang Feng, saying they hadn't seen him in ten years. Not only does it seem he hasn't aged much but his kung fu has improved. That palm he struck in Guo Jing's chest was lethal; it will take at least ten days to half a month to fully recover. The two moved on to Hong Qigong, they didn't know where he was and missed him very much. Huang Rong lived on the Peach Blossom Island, but she held the position of the Beggar Clan leader so all the clan's affairs had to be cleared through her. One of the reasons she returned to Jiangnan was to meet with elder Zhu and discuss what was happening with the clan, and to search for news of Hong Qigong. But Guo Jing had suffered an injury, so they had to return to the island first. Then they talked about Yang Guo, and Huang Rong called him into the boat and told him to explain everything. Yang Guo told them that his mother had died due to an illness, and how he had wandered around in Jiaying afterwards. The Guo couple reminisced about their friendship with Mu Nianci and couldn't help but feel depressed. After Yang Guo had returned to the deck, Guo Jing said, "I've always had one wish and you know this. Today, heaven has given me this chance to see Guo'er, my wish can be completed."

Years ago, Guo Jing's father Guo Xiaotian and Yang Guo's grandfather Yang Tiexin became brothers, and both their wives were pregnant. The two agreed that if their wives gave births to boys, they will become brothers; if they were girls

they would be sisters; if it was one girl and one boy then it would be arranged for them be married. Eventually they had two boys, Guo Jing and Yang Guo's father Yang Kang became brothers. However Yang Kang recognized an enemy as his father, his deeds were unchivalrous and eventually he died tragically near Jiaxing's Iron Spear Temple. Guo Jing still felt responsible for this. When he mentioned this, Huang Rong understood his intentions and said, "I won't agree."

Guo Jing asked, with light surprise, "Agree what?"

Huang Rong said, "Fu'er won't be married to that boy."

Guo Jing said, "His father didn't do any good, but our families friendship is a long one. Yang Guo has a handsome face, he's extremely clever, and under our teaching he will achieve great things in the future."

Huang Rong said, "I'm afraid that he is too clever for his own good."

Guo Jing replied, "Weren't you clever? What is wrong with that?"

Huang Rong laughed and said, "I eventually fell for a dumb boy."

Guo Jing chuckled and said, "When Fu'er grows up, she may not find a dumb boy to love. Anyway, another boy as dumb as me, I doubt there'll be another one."

Huang Rong put on a shy face and said, "Are they rare?" The two joked around for a few more words before Guo Jing turned serious and said, "My father only had one wish, Uncle Yang Tie Xin also relied on me before he died. I didn't do my best with brother Yang and sister Mu. If I don't treat Guo'er as my own, how can I face father and uncle Yang?" He sighed, and looked disappointed.

Huang Rong gently said, "The two of them are young, there is no need to rush. If in the future Guo'er doesn't develop any bad points, then you can do what you like."

Guo Jing got up and clapped his hands, his spirits raised and said, "Thank you for your permission; I can't say how thankful I am."

Huang Rong replied, "I didn't agree to anything. All I said was watch what becomes of Guo'er in the future."

Guo Jing stood up and his waist straightened. He knew what Huang Rong meant and said, "Brother Yang Kang was raised in the palace of the Jin, and learned his ways from them. Guo'er will be on our island and he won't turn bad. It was I who named him all those years ago. His name is Yang Guo, "to correct past mistakes"; if he does do wrong he will be able to change and right it. You can relax."

Huang Rong laughed and said, "How can a name decide things? You are called Guo Jing, are you peaceful and quiet? Ever since you were young, you would jump around like a big monkey." Guo Jing thought about what she said, and wasn't able to respond. Huang Rong smiled, and changed the subject, and didn't mention the affair again.

The boat was quiet as they reached the island. Guo Fu was ecstatic that she had gained two little friends who were about the same age as her. Yang Guo had taken Huang Rong's antidote, and now his poison had dissipated completely. He and Guo Fu had their arguments when they first met, but they were still kids. After a few days they had forgotten about it. However in a few days, the four would argue again in game of catching crickets.

One day, Yang Guo came out of the house, looking for crickets again. He was relaxing, enjoying the scenery and whistling to himself when he suddenly heard laughing and

joking behind the hills. He rushed to have a look, and saw Guo Fu and the Wu brothers lifting rocks and pushing aside grass; they were looking for crickets. Wu Dunru was holding a bamboo tube, Guo Fu was holding a basin. Wu Xiuwen moved a rock and gave a laugh, a large cricket jumped out. Wu Xiuwen jumped on it, and held it with his two hands and laughed joyfully. Guo Fu said, "Give it to me, gimme."

Wu Xiuwen picked the cricket up and said, "Fine, I'll give it to you." He opened the lid of the basin and put the cricket in. The cricket's head and legs looked healthy, it had a thick waist and abdomen, and it looked like a spirited cricket. Wu Xiuwen said, "This cricket is going to be an invincible general, brother Yang, all the crickets that you have caught won't be a match." Yang Guo was unconvinced and took out a few bamboo tubes containing crickets. He picked out his liveliest one to fight. After a few rounds, the large cricket bit the waist of Yang Guo's cricket, causing it to slip out of the basin, fluttering its wings, looking weird.

Guo Fu laughed, "I won!"

Yang Guo said, "Wait, I've got more." He took out three but they lost too, the third one bitten in half by the large cricket. Yang Guo's face turned and said, "I'm not playing." and turned around and walked away. Suddenly he heard three "ji" noises behind him in the grass, it was the call of a cricket, but it sounded different than normal.

Wu Dunru said, "Another one." He parted the grass and suddenly jumped back, gasping, "Snake, snake!" Yang Guo turned around and saw a striped poisonous snake, flicking its tongue out of the grass. Yang Guo picked up a stone, and aimed it at the snake. It struck it on the head, the snake twisted and turned a few times and died. He saw beside the dead snake was a black cricket, its appearance strange,

spreading out its wings to call out. Guo Fu laughed and said, "Brother Yang, catch the black one."

Yang Guo heard that there was a ridiculing tone behind her words. Yang Guo's proud character rose and said, "Fine." He then went and caught it.

Guo Fu chuckled and said, "That thing, what do you want it for? You want to battle with my invincible general?"

Yang Guo said, "If you want to battle fine, this little one won't let others bully it." He placed the black cricket into Guo Fu's basin. What was strange was that when the large cricket saw the small black one, it looked startled and seemed to shrink away from it. Guo Fu and the Wu brothers shouted and called out to encourage it. The little black cricket raised its head and jumped in front of the big one. The big cricket, not daring to face it in battle, wanted to jump out of the basin. The black cricket jumped up and, high in midair, bit the end of the large cricket, and both of them fell out of the air. The large cricket shook a few times, and then turned on its abdomen and died. Amongst crickets, there are types, which liked to live with poisonous worms or with poisonous centipedes. This type is called the "Centipede Cricket" and those which live with poisonous snakes are called "Snake Crickets". Because of the poison on it, the normal types of cricket aren't their match. Yang Guo's cricket was a "Snake Cricket".

Guo Fu was very displeased with the fact that her invincible general had died, and after thinking for a while said to Yang Guo, "Brother Yang, give the black one to me."

Yang Guo replied, "Giving it to you originally wasn't a problem, but why did you ridicule the little black one?"

Guo Fu replied, "If you don't give it to me fine, who wants it?" She picked up her basin and turned it over, the little black

cricket fell onto the ground, and she squashed it with her right foot. Yang Guo gasped, his blood began to boil, his face went red, he couldn't control himself and he hit her hard by the side of the ear.

Guo Fu didn't know whether to stay quiet or cry. Wu Xiuwen shouted at him, "The little boy hits people!" and threw a fist towards Yang Guo's chest. His family's skills are deep. Ever since he was little his parents had taught him martial arts, so his martial arts roots are good, the fist that was coming towards Yang Guo's chest was not light. Yang Guo flared up, and threw a fist back but Wu Xiuwen dodged it. Yang Guo leapt up to attack, but Wu Dunru stuck out his leg to hook Yang Guo's leg, Yang Guo fell on the ground. Wu Xiuwen turned around and jumped on Yang Guo's body. Held down by the two brothers, four fists rained down fiercely on him.

Though Yang Guo was two years older, it was difficult for two fists to defend against four. The Wu brothers had been taught some higher martial arts, and Yang Guo had only learnt very basic martial arts from Mu Nianci. He wasn't their match. He bit his teeth and didn't make a sound.

Wu Dunru said, "If you apologize and beg we'll let you go."

Yang Guo shouted, "Never!"

Wu Xiuwen threw out another two fists. Guo Fu was watching aside pleased that the Wu brothers were helping her to get revenge.

The Wu brothers knew that if they attacked the head, it would leave wounds, and if Guo Jing and Huang Rong found out, they would be blamed. So they treated Yang Guo's body with fists and kicks. Guo Fu saw the beating was severe and was a little bit scared. But when she felt the red mark left by Yang Guo by her ear, she felt pleased and shouted out, "Hit

him harder, harder!" The Wu brothers listened, and hit harder.

Yang Guo was on the ground, and when he heard Guo Fu's instructions he thought, "Guo Fu you evil little bitch, I'm going to get you for this." He felt extreme pain all over his back and it looked as if he would endure more. The Wu brothers had practiced martial arts since they were young, so their punches and kicks were strong. A normal adult wouldn't withstand it. If Yang Guo had not practiced a bit of internal energy, he would have long ago fainted. He bit his teeth harder and waved his hands wildly. Then he suddenly felt a cold and slippery object; it was the dead poisonous snake. He picked it up and threw it back at the Wu brothers.

When the Wu brothers saw the stripped poisonous snake, they gasped. Yang Guo turned his body around, and threw a fierce fist, hitting Wu Dunru in the nose causing a nosebleed. Yang Guo scampered up and quickly ran away. The Wu brothers were indignant, and chased after him. Guo Fu shouted out, "Catch him, catch him!" and followed.

Yang Guo ran on for a while and then turned around to see Wu Dunru's face full of blood, the expression on his face was furious, and knew if he was caught by the two brothers he would suffer an even more severe beating than before. So he ran and hurried to the foot of "Practicing Sword Peak", and climbed up.

Though Wu Dunru's face was full of blood, the wound didn't really hurt. It was just that feeling his face full of blood that made him angry, and he hurried after Yang Guo. Yang Guo climbed up the peak with the Wu brothers close behind unrelenting. Guo Fu was at the foot of the peak, hearing the footsteps she looked up and was pleased to see what was happening. Yang Guo hurried for a while, only to see a cliff, with nowhere else to go. Years ago, whenever Huang Yaoshi

invented a new stance, he would jump across the chasm and then go to the peak top and practice it. Could Yang Guo jump across? He thought, "I'd rather jump and die, than get caught by those two and get beaten up again." He turned around and shouted, "If you come one step closer I'll jump!" Wu Dunru stopped, while Wu Xiuwen shouted back, "Jump if you want, who cares about you? You don't have the guts anyway!" As he said this he crept closer.

Yang Guo's blood rose again, and was about to jump when he saw a large loose rock from the corner of his eye. In a rush of blood and not thinking about the consequences, he stretched out his hand to move the smaller stones, the large stone did indeed begin to move. He moved behind the large stone, and pushed with all his strength, the stone bounced twice and after a crashing sound, the stone began to roll down the hill. The Wu brothers were shocked when they saw him push the stone, the colour of their faces changed, and they hurriedly moved out of the way. The large stone carried numerous pieces of dirt and sand, and after moving past the Wu brothers, turned over many flowers and plants before heading into the sea. Wu Dunru panicked, his foot slipped, and he started to roll down. Wu Xiuwen caught him a rush. The two of them couldn't stand up on the slope and the both of them rolled down for about sixty or seventy feet; luckily a tree managed to block their path.

Huang Rong was in the house when she heard a sound far away, and followed the sound quickly to "Practicing Sword Peak", only to see a field of dirt and sand, her daughter hidden in the grass, so frightened that she couldn't cry, and the Wu brothers' heads and faces full of blood. Huang Rong picked up her daughter and asked, "What happened?" Guo Fu buried herself into her mother and cried. After she finished crying she explained that Yang Guo had hit her for no reason, and when the Wu brothers helped her, Yang Guo wanted to roll a stone on them to kill them. She pushed all

the blame onto Yang Guo. She didn't say anything about her squashing his cricket, or the Wu brothers beating Yang Guo. Huang Rong listened, and saw the red mark left on Guo Fu's face, the slap must have been strong, and she sympathized with her and comforted her.

Guo Jing also hurried to the scene, and saw the Wu brothers hurt and asked what happened. He was angry but also concerned about Yang Guo, and hurried up to the peak; he searched around but couldn't see a trace of him. He raised his voice and called out, "Guo'er, Guo'er." The loud voice resonated out for miles, but he did not see Yang Guo, nor did he hear a reply. Guo Jing waited a while becoming increasingly concerned and eventually descended down from the peak. He rowed around the island in a boat, searching for him until it was dark but still he couldn't see a trace of Yang Guo.

When Yang Guo pushed the stone and saw the Wu brothers roll down the peak, he had seen Huang Rong coming, and knew he would face a heavy punishment and so hid himself among the rocks in the cliff. He heard Guo Jing's call but did not reply. Yang Guo was hungry but he did not move from his hiding place among the rocks. He saw it was approaching dusk, the sea beginning to darken, and there was no sound of people anywhere nearby. After a while, the sky was lit up with stars, a cool wind was blowing; he felt cold and came out of his hiding place and gazed down the mountain. He saw clearly a light coming out from the window, and imagined the Guo couple, Ke Zhen'E, Guo Fu and the Wu brothers, eating a meal around the table; chicken, duck, fish and meat filling the table, and couldn't stop by drooling. But he thought of how they were talking about his punishment behind his back, and couldn't help but be furious. He stood there at the foot of the mountain, in the sea breeze he thought about how he had been bullied all his life, everyone looking at him coldly; he was filled with a feeling of indignity.

In reality, when Guo Jing could not find Yang Guo, how could he eat? When Huang Rong saw that her husband was troubled, she knew he wouldn't listen to her so she did the same as him, and accompanied him in his torment. Before the next day was bright the two went out searching again. Yang Guo had endured hunger for a day and a half now, and on the second morning he gave in, descended the peak, and went to a stream and caught some frogs. He peeled off their skin and picked up some dry leaves, wanting to roast them on a fire. He was by the streamside and wanted to cook the frogs immediately to cure his hunger but thought that Guo Jing and Huang Rong might see the smoke, so he went into a cave and prepared the fire. As soon as the frog's legs were golden, he ate straight away, eating a leg in one big bite. He suddenly heard Guo Jing's voice calling out, "Guo'er, Guo'er!? He thought, "You want me to come out so you can beat me, I'm not going to come out."

That night he slept in the cave and after he had slept for a while, he awoke suddenly and saw Ouyang Feng come into the cave. He said, "Son, I've come to teach you kung fu in order for you to avoid getting beat up by the two little Wus." Yang Guo was happily surprised and followed him out of the cave, only to see him crouch on the ground, and gave out a few "gu" sounds before pushing out two palms. Yang Guo tried to follow, but his palms and kicks weren't the same. Ouyang Feng curled his hand into a fist and threw it out, Yang Guo couldn't avoid it and it landed on top of his head, the pain was severe and he got up.

After being hit on the head, he woke up; it seemed it was all just a dream. He felt his head, and came across a bump. It ached severely and he sighed repeatedly, thinking, "It looks like father has recovered and has escaped from the bell. When is he going to come and collect me, and teach me kung fu so I can avoid being bullied by others?"

He went out of the cave, and looked up at the sky, and saw many stars hanging within the branches of the trees, and remembered that Ouyang Feng had taught him kung fu. He had forgotten about this; he crouched down, gave out a few “gu” calls; he wanted to use the formula of the “Toad Stance” that Ouyang Feng had taught him in Jiaying. He tried to use his fists and legs, but whatever he did, he couldn’t do this stance. He searched his mind, and threw out two palms, like he did in his dream, but that was a completely different thing. He was alone at the foot of the peak, and stared out at the sea, the lonely feeling in his heart was stronger than ever. Suddenly he heard a gentle voice from the sea calling, “Guo’er, Guo’er.” He immediately replied, “I’m here. I’m here.” He ran down onto the beach where Guo Jing could see him from faraway. In high spirits Guo Jing rowed quickly to the shore, and jumped onto the beach. The stars shone on the two as they rushed to each other. He picked up Yang Guo into his chest and just said, “Come back and have supper.” He was emotional, his voice almost cracking. When they reached the house, Huang Rong had prepared supper for them. They never mentioned what had happened again.

At dawn the next day, he called Yang Guo, the Wu brothers and Guo Fu out the hall, and invited Ke Zhen’E as well. He instructed the four disciples to kowtow to the six Jiangnan Freaks headstone, and then said to Ke Zhen’E, “Senior Master, I request your permission to take in four grand apprentices.”

Ke Zhen’E was delighted and said, “That will be for the best, I congratulate you.” Guo Jing then instructed Yang Guo, the Wu brothers to first kowtow to Ke Zhen’E and then underwent the ritual of a new disciple to a master towards the Guo couple.

Guo Fu smiled and asked, “Mother, I need to do this as well?”

Huang Rong replied, "Of course."

Guo Fu gleefully kowtowed to the three.

Guo Jing said seriously, "From today onwards, you four are apprentice brothers."

Guo Fu interrupted, "Wrong, its apprentice brother and sister."

Guo Jing gave his daughter a look and said, "When father has not finished speaking, don't open your mouth." He waited and then said, "From now on you four must treat each other with love and respect, share in good fortune and suffer in misery together. If there are any disturbances or conflicts, I won't look lightly upon it." He looked at Yang Guo when he said this. Yang Guo thought, "As long as you treat your daughter the same, then I won't push her around."

Ke Zhen'E took over, and passed on the rules and regulations of their school, it was the usual don't bully the weak, don't harm the innocents. The Seven Freaks had numerous rules but Ke Zhen'E couldn't remember all of them so just said the main ones. Guo Jing said, "I have learned a variety of skills, apart from the skills of the Jiangnan Seven Heroes (this is what Guo Jing called them.). The Quanzhen Sect's internal energy, the Peach Blossom Island and Beggars Clan's skills; I have learned a bit of all of them. You mustn't forget your roots so today I will teach you Grand Master's skills first.

As he was about to pass on the formula, Huang Rong saw that Yang Guo's head was down and his body was sticking out, his face had an indescribable aura, like Yang Kang's. Her heart was troubled, and thought, "Although his father didn't die directly by my hands, it could be said that I caused his death. If I don't watch over him, he will become trouble in the future." She smiled as she thought of a plan, "Teaching four of them will be hard work. I'll teach Guo'er." Before Guo Jing

could agree, Ke Zhen'E clapped his hand and said, "What an excellent idea! Your intelligence is incomparable; you can definitely make something out of this disciple." Guo Jing was pleased in his heart, he knew his wife was infinitely cleverer than him, her methods must exceed his. He didn't open his mouth to object.

Guo Fu was afraid of her father's strictness and said, "Mother, I want you to teach me."

Huang Rong smiled, "You want me because you can cause trouble and you won't be able to learn any kung fu. It will be better if your father teaches you." Guo Fu sneaked a glance at her father, and saw him staring at her; she turned around and didn't dare speak out again.

Huang Rong spoke to her husband and said, "We will set a rule: you mustn't teach Guo'er and I won't teach your three. The four of them can't pass on skills to each other, just in case they practice incorrectly, there is no need to get hurt for no reason."

Guo Jing replied, "Of course."

Huang Rong said, "Guo'er, follow me."

Yang Guo loathed Guo Fu and the Wu brothers, when he heard what Huang Rong had said, about not mixing with the other students, it was what he wanted, and followed her into the inner hall. Huang Rong led him to the study, and picked up a book saying, "Your teacher had seven teachers, their names were the Jiangnan Seven Freaks, first master is Grandpa Ke, second master was the Swift Hand Scholar Zhu Cong, now I will teach his skills to you."

As she said this she opened the book and read clearly, "Zi Yue: When practicing what you are taught, can you change? If you've got friends all over, is it extreme?" (N.B. Sorry about

this translation, it's supposedly from "The Analects of Confucius", my Chinese is not at the level where I can decipher old sayings and writings.) The book that she picked was "The Analects of Confucius". Yang Guo thought this was strange but didn't dare to question her, and just repeated what she read and wrote down what she said. Throughout the day, all Huang Rong taught him was reading and writing, and refused to mention teaching kung fu.

One day after Yang Guo finished studying, he went to the back of the mountain to take a walk, and remembered Ouyang Feng. He didn't know where he was, he thought of fond memories, and at that moment flipped his body upside down, and copied the movements of Ouyang Feng. After a while, following the formula for contrary blood flow, he felt the more he stayed upside down the smoother it felt. He flipped upright and after a loud "gu" call, pushed out his two palms. He felt his body was smooth and relaxed, the gracefulness incomparable, and his body was covered with sweat. He didn't know that after a session of practicing, his internal energy had increased a level. All Ouyang Feng's kung fu was dangerous; the most lethal types of the higher set of skills. Yang Guo's intelligence and comprehension was high. Although he had learned very little in the past few days, now that he had begun to practice, his internal energy improved.

From now on, he would study and recite books and manuscripts with Huang Rong everyday, and whenever he had spare time in the evenings he would go to the secluded mountainside and practice his martial arts. He didn't intend to practice in order to learn the frightening skill; it was because every time he practiced, his body would be filled with a relaxed feeling. After he has achieved this then he would stop.

He secretly practiced and Guo Jing and Huang Rong didn't know. Huang Rong taught him literature, and within three months she had taught him the whole of "The Analects of Confucius". Yang Guo was able to memorize the texts quickly. Yang Guo was able to memorize the texts quickly. Though he disliked learning texts and manuscripts, he didn't raise any objections.

In reality, Huang Rong was not happy just teaching him how to read and study, but thought, "His intelligence is not below mine and if his character is like his father's and he learns kung fu he could definitely cause a lot of trouble in the future. Why not teach him to study, and shape him into a worthy and honest person. That had its good points." That's why she picked "The Analects of Confucius" and now she would follow it with "Meng Zi".

A few months past and Huang Rong had still not passed on any martial arts, nor had Yang Guo asked about it. Ever since the fight with the other children, he had not tried to mingle with them, and kept himself to himself, becoming even more of a loner. He thought that although Guo Jing had taken him in as a student, he didn't have the intention of passing any skills to him. He already wasn't a match for the Wu brothers. If he had a fight with them after a year or so under Guo Jing's teachings, it would be difficult for him not to die at their hands. He made a decision, when there was a chance to leave the island, he would take it.

One afternoon when Yang Guo was supposed to study a few passages of "Meng Zi", he slipped out of the library and went out for a walk on the beach. He looked out at the sea, at the white waves and foam, and thought, "When will I be able to leave this place, and happily leave the others where they are." As he was gazing, he suddenly heard some wind sounds from the Peach Blossom forest. Curious, he went over to have a look, and eventually found his way. From a distance could

see it was Guo Jing in the forest teaching the Wu brothers some fists and kicks. He was teaching them a stance of the "Trapping Hand", "Holding the Bridge", "Changing the Pillar" (tuo liang huan zhu). Guo Jing gave them pointers, and then demonstrated it, instructing the Wu brothers to copy him. Yang Guo just took a glance, and recognized the essence of the stance immediately, but the Wu brothers practiced and practiced but couldn't quite get it. Guo Jing himself wasn't the best at picking things up immediately, and knew how hard things could be, so did not lose his temper with them and repeated this move again.

Yang Guo sighed and thought, "If Uncle Guo was willing to teach me, I wouldn't be as stupid as them." Feeling unhappy, he returned to his room and slept. After supper he read a few more books, but thought this was a waste of his time and so he went to the beach again. He practiced the punch and kicks that Guo Jing taught, and went over it a few times before he started to feel troubled and thought, "If I secretly practice their skills to a much better standard than the Wu brothers, I won't have to be scared of them." This idea initially was good but as he thought about it he changed his mind. "Uncle Guo doesn't want to teach me so why should I learn it in secret? Hmm... even if he decides to teach me, I won't learn it. I may get beaten to death but who cares?" As he thought about this, he felt pride but also sadness. He sat and leaned on the cliff face; the soothing sound of the waves of the sea eventually sending him to sleep.

In the morning, Yang Guo did not go for breakfast, nor did he go to the library to study, he was by the sea and managed to gather several large clams which he roasted on a fire and ate. He thought, "Even if I don't eat Guo food, I won't starve to death." He saw a large boat and a small boat by the shore. "I won't be able to operate that large boat, and I can't row far in that small boat, how can I escape from this island?" He thought about this for half a day, having nothing to do, he

went beside a large cliff face and flipped his body, and practiced the internal energy that Ouyang Feng taught.

At the point where his blood was beginning to flow quickly, where his body felt lucid and smooth, he suddenly heard a shout from behind. He was caught unawares and fell down, his legs and arms numb, he couldn't get back up. It was Guo Fu and the Wu brothers arriving on the scene. Behind the cliff face was an extremely quiet and peaceful area, with no one around. Because the paths of the island were designed to follow the five changes, Guo Fu and the brothers didn't dare to run about blindly. They were looking for a place to play and followed a path, eventually winding up here where Yang Guo was practicing. It was fortunate that Yang Guo's internal strength was shallow; otherwise the interruption by the three would have scrambled his veins and meridians, causing him to suffer paralysis.

Guo Fu clapped her hand and said, "What are you doing here?" Yang Guo supported himself on the cliff face and slowly pulled himself up, gave Guo Fu a stare, turned around and walked away.

Wu Xiuwen called out, "Hey, apprentice sister asked a question; are you pretending to not care or are you ignoring us?"

Yang Guo coldly said, "How can you take charge in this matter?"

Wu Xiuwen was offended and said, "We only care about having a good time, not greeting mad dogs."

Yang Guo replied, "You are right, mad dogs will bite when they see people, three mad dogs have just come, barking and howling madly."

Wu Dunru angrily said, "You said three mad dogs? You abuse people?"

Yang Guo laughed and replied, "No, I only scold dogs, not people."

Wu Dunru could not take anymore and curled a fist and threw it out at Yang Guo, who managed to avoid it. Wu Xiuwen remembered what their teacher had said about not fighting amongst each other. If news of this ever got to teacher, they would be punished, so he grabbed hold of his brother's arm and laughed coldly at Yang Guo saying, "Big brother Yang, you've been under the care of master wife learning martial arts, we three from master. A few months have passed but we don't know who has advanced the most. How about sparring with each other, comparing skills, do you dare?"

Yang Guo was aggravated and originally wanted to say, "I don't have your luck. Master wife has not taught me any kind of martial arts." But when he heard the four words "do you dare to", he extinguished his angry feelings and prevented himself from saying what he intended to. He gave out a grunt and stared coldly at him.

Wu Xiuwen said, "We are here to test each others skill, no matter who wins and who loses, no one is allowed to tell master or master wife. Even if your head is cracked open, you must say you fell. If the loser complains about the winner, then they are born of dogs, a bastard; big brother Yang, do you dare?" As he said the words "do you dare" his eyes went blank, as Yang Guo threw a heavy fist into Wu Xiuwen's left eye. Wu Xiuwen jumped back to prevent himself falling over.

Wu Dunru said, "You don't care about face do you with a punch like that." He then used the punches and kicks that Guo Jing taught him, and attacked Yang Guo in the abdomen. Yang Guo could not avoid this punch and got hit. Then he saw Wu Dunru throw out a kick at him, and then he suddenly

thought of something and he remembered the moves that Guo Jing taught to the Wu brothers yesterday. He bent his right leg, and with his left hand pushed the incoming right leg, it was the "Secret Hero in the Noisy City" Quan Jinfu's "Trapping Hand", the stance of "Holding the Bridge, Changing the Pillar" (tuo liang huan zhu), though it wasn't a very special move, it is useful when facing an enemy. Yesterday when Guo Jing repeated the move, the Wu brothers learned it, but when it was put in use for real, it didn't compare with the Yang Guo's, who only had a glance at it and just went over it once. Wu Dunru fell over after this move by Yang Guo.

Wu Xiuwen was already aggravated with the punch he received in his eye, but when he saw his brother fall he picked himself up and threw out a left punch. Yang Guo dodged to the left, but he only knew very little of the stances of the punches, so he couldn't compete as a right fist of Wu Xiuwen hit him squarely on the right side. Wu Dunru picked himself up and the brothers attacked from both sides. The brothers' martial arts foundation was already stronger than Yang Guo's, and he wasn't a match. Added to the fact that the Wu brothers had been training under Guo Jing for a few months, how would he be able to stand up against them? After a while, seven, eight punches had landed on Yang Guo's head, back and waist. Yang Guo flared up and thought, "Even if I get beaten to death by you, I won't try to escape." He wildly threw some punches out; they weren't at all from any set of orthodox skills.

Wu Xiuwen saw the state that Yang Guo was in and was slightly afraid. They had already taught him a lesson and didn't want to carry on. He said, "You've already lost, we'll let you go, there's no need to fight more."

Yang Guo shouted, "Who wants you to ease off?" and dashed at him, attacking fiercely. Wu Xiuwen stretched out his left

hand and with his right hand grabbed hold of his chest, trying to pull him forward in a rush. At this time, Wu Dunru threw two punches at Yang Guo's back. Yang Guo couldn't stand steadily, and fell forwards. Wu Dunru held his head with two hands and said, "You ready to give up?"

"Who wants to give up to you mad dogs?"

Wu Dunru was offended and pushed Yang Guo's face in the sand and said, "If you don't give up then suffocate to death."

Yang Guo's eyes, nose, and face were full of sand and dirt; he couldn't breathe, after a while, his body felt like cracking. Wu Dunru was holding his head with two hands, Wu Xiuwen was on his back, Yang Guo could not escape and as he was finding it difficult to breathe, the internal energy of the "Toad Stance" that he has been practicing over the last few days suddenly became fluent; a warm chi was flowing through his "dan tian". All of a sudden, his body was full of energy as he leapt up fiercely, his eyes closed when he threw out two palms. It hit Wu Xiuwen in the lower abdomen; Wu Xiuwen gave out a cry before falling to the ground unconscious. The palm's power came from Ouyang Feng's "Toad Stance", the power of it of course could not compare to Ouyang Feng's, and Yang Guo had not intentionally used it. But since he was in danger he involuntarily used it, and Wu Xiuwen could not withstand it.

Wu Dunru jumped back but when he saw his brother didn't move and his eyes were rolled back, he knew that Yang Guo had killed his brother. He was startled but shouted out, "Master, master, brother has died!" He sobbed as ran to take the news to Guo Jing. Guo Fu was scared, and followed.

Yang Guo spat out the sand and dirt, and rubbed the sand off his face, but felt he didn't have an ounce of strength left in his body; it was extremely difficult for him to even move one step. He saw Wu Xiuwen in front of him, not moving, and

heard Wu Dunru cry out, "My brother is dead!" and knew something was wrong but he didn't have the strength to run away.

Some time passed before he saw Guo Jing and Huang Rong hurriedly leaping to the scene. Guo Jing picked up Wu Xiuwen and placed his palm on Wu Xiuwen's chest. Huang Rong ran to Yang Guo's side and asked, "Where's Ouyang Feng? Where is he?" Yang Guo did not reply. Huang Rong asked, "When did he teach you the "Toad Stance"?" It looked like Yang Guo was listening, but it also seemed that he wasn't, his eyes losing their focus, just staring in front, his mouth tightly closed, scared of letting one word slip out. Huang Rong saw that he didn't care, so held his two arms and said, "Tell me! Where's Ouyang Feng?" Yang Guo still did not move.

After a while, Wu Xiuwen regained consciousness after Guo Jing had channeled his internal energy into him. Guo Jing then brought Ke Zhen'E and Guo Fu to the scene. When Ke Zhen'E heard from Guo Fu that Yang Guo flipped his body, and heard that he had killed Wu Xiuwen, he knew that Yang Guo was Ouyang Feng's heir. Full of hate and revenge, he rushed to Yang Guo's side, hearing Huang Rong ask, "Where is Ouyang Feng." But Yang Guo still didn't care. He walked up to Yang Guo and held his iron staff high, and shouted out, "Where is Ouyang Feng that scoundrel? If you don't tell me, I'll kill you with one strike!"

Without care for his life he shouted back, "He's not a scoundrel, he's a good person. You can kill me if you want, but I won't say a word."

Ke Zhen'E was angry and raised his weapon, ready to strike down. Guo Jing shouted out, "Senior Master, don't! Only to hear a thudding sound, as the staff evaded Yang Guo's body and struck into the sand. Ke Zhen'E had wanted to scare him

into saying something but as the weapon reached his head, there was still no reply so he let his weapon slip.

Ke Zhe E shouted out, "You refuse to speak?"

Yang Guo shouted back, "If you've got guts go ahead and kill me, I'm not scared of you blind man." Guo Jing rushed over, and slapped Yang Guo across the face fiercely. "You dare to be disrespectful towards your Grand Master!"

Yang Guo did not cry, and calmly said, "You people won't raise your hands to kill me, fine. I'll do it myself!" He turned around and rushed towards the sea.

Guo Jing shouted, "Guo'er, come back!" Yang Guo walked even faster. Guo Jing went over to stop him but Huang Rong said, "Stop." Guo Jing stopped only to see Yang Guo enter the sea, heading into the waves.

Guo Jing gasped and said, "He can't swim well, Rong'er, we need to save him." and went to rescue Yang Guo.

Huang Rong said, "He's not dead yet, there's no need to rush." After a while, Yang Guo had not returned. She admitted defeat to Yang Guo's pride, and went into the sea. She was a good swimmer, rescuing someone close to the shore was easy for her, she dived into the water and pulled up Yang Guo and carried him back to the beach. She put him on the cliff side rocks, letting him spit out the sea water by himself and slowly regain consciousness.

Guo Jing looked at his master, and then his wife and asked, "So?"

Huang Rong replied, "He learned his kung fu before arriving on the island; even if Ouyang Feng did come, we would know about it." Guo Jing nodded. She asked, "How's little Wu's injury?"

Guo Jing replied, "It looks like he'll need at least two months rest."

Ke Zhen'E said, "Tomorrow I'll leave for Jiaxing."

Huang Rong and Guo Jing looked at each other, understanding his intentions; he would never live with someone who was related to Ouyang Feng in any way. Huang Rong said, "Senior Master, this is your home, why do you give in to the child?"

That night Guo Jing summoned Yang Guo to his room and said, "Guo'er, all that has happened is in the past, we won't mention it. You were disrespectful to Senior Master, I cannot allow you to stay with my school, from now on, call me Uncle Guo. I'm afraid that Uncle Guo's inability to teach you will lead to your future failures. In a few days, I'll take you to Mount Zhongnan to Chongyang Palace and request Quanzhen sect's elder Changchun Zi (Eternal Spring) to accept you into their sect. Quanzhen sect is famous for its martial arts, I hope you take this opportunity in Chongyang Garden to hone your skills and reflect on your character, and so, hopefully, you will become a gentleman."

Yang Guo replied, "Yes, Uncle Guo." He changed his greeting, and didn't regard Guo Jing as his teacher anymore.

Guo Jing got up early in the morning and prepared money and luggage; he said goodbyes to his wife, his master, his daughter and the Wu brothers. He left with Yang Guo by boat. They arrived at Zheijang's Red Sea. Guo Jing bought two horses, and he and Yang Guo traveled north. Yang Guo had never ridden a horse before, but now his internal energy has some foundation, and after a few days of adjusting, he could freely control the reins. He was young and eager, always riding ahead of Guo Jing.

The next day, the two passed the Yellow River (Yangtze) and arrived at Xiaxi. Ever since the Jin lost to the Mongols, everywhere north of the Yangtze was under the influence of the Mongols. In Guo Jing's younger days, he once was a general in the Mongol army. If he met any one who knew him, he knew there would be trouble so he changed his two horses for two rough looking mules and changed into old torn clothing; he disguised himself as a troubled villager. Yang Guo also changed his clothing and wore a blue green hat, and then got on the mule. The mule was bad tempered, and it was slow, Yang Guo spent the next few days trying to break its temper.

One day they arrived at Cage Village (Fanchuan); it was in the area of Mount Zhongnan. The village got its name from the Kai General Fan who had successfully captured a city. Along the way they passed winding mountain ranges, pine forests, fields of vegetables and cotton; its scenery not unlike that of Jiangnan.

After Yang Guo left Peach Blossom Island, his feelings towards the events on the island were still there but he would not mention them. He couldn't hold onto this stance, and it slipped out, "Uncle Guo, this place is quite similar to our island."

When Guo Jing heard him say "our island" he was pleased to no end and said, "Guo'er, we are not far from Mount Zhongnan, remember to take this opportunity at Quanzhen and learn from their teachings. A few years later on, I will come back for you and take you back to the island."

Yang Guo shook his head and said, "I will never go back to the island." Guo Jing forgot about Yang Guo's young age, the words that he said came straight from his heart. Guo Jing had no reply to this. After a while he said, "You are angry with Uncle and Auntie Guo?"

Yang Guo replied, "How can I dare to? It's you that should be angry with me." Guo Jing gave up, and didn't open his mouth again.

The two of them went up a hill, and in the afternoon, they arrived at a temple on the hill's peak. Guo Jing saw three words were written on top of the doors, "Light Everywhere Temple". He tied the mules to a pine tree outside the temple and went inside for a meal. Inside the temple were seven or eight monks, when they saw he was plainly dressed, the monks calmly gave them two bowls of noodles and seven or eight buns for them to eat. Yang Guo and Guo Jing sat on a rock underneath a pine tree to eat their noodles; they glanced around and saw there was a large stone slab behind the pine tree. Tall grass was concealing what was on the slab, only two words could be seen, "Changchun". Guo Jing was moved, and went over to take a closer look. It was Changchun Zi Qiu Chuji's writing, and on it was a poem left by him; "The gloomy sky has come to earth, why doesn't it teach ten thousand souls to be bitter? The ten thousand souls want to be delayed; the cries of the dead have no sound. Shouting up to the sky but it won't reply, their fragmented slender forms toil. The thousands are confused in peace, teaching the living to live their soul."

When Guo Jing saw this poem, it reminded him of the events ten years ago when he was on the plains of Mongolia, touching the stone slab without saying a word, reminiscing about the time when he first met Qiu Chuji.

Yang Guo asked, "What is written on the stone slab?"

Guo Jing replied, "It is a poem written by your Grand Master Qiu. He has seen the troubles of the world and was extremely sad." He then explained the poem to Yang Guo and said, "Elder Qiu's martial arts are outstanding; he cares about the common people and is a respected teacher. Your father was

an able student of elder Qiu. I'm sure that on your father's behalf, he will treat you especially well. Do your best at studying the martial arts there and you will definitely become something in the future."

Yang Guo asked, "Uncle Guo, I have one question I want to ask you."

"What is it?"

"How did my father die?"

Guo Jing's face lost its colour, as he remembered the events of the Iron Spear Temple, his body trembled, unable to speak.

"Who caused my father's death?" Guo Jing did not reply.

Yang Guo remembered when he asked his mother the same question, she responded the same way. Although Guo Jing treated him like his own son, Huang Rong was neglectful of him. Although he was young, he felt that there was a hidden secret to this matter. He couldn't hold back and shouted, "My father's death was caused by you and Auntie Guo wasn't it?"

Guo Jing was shocked, and slammed down his hand on the stone, and bellowed angrily, "Who told you these lies?" The power in his palm was great; because of his angry reaction the stone slab continually shook. Yang Guo saw his anger and said, "I'm sorry, I won't ever say these sorts of things again, don't be angry Uncle Guo."

Guo Jing loved him very much, and when he heard Yang Guo's apology, his feelings dissipated and he was about to comfort him when he heard a "hey" shout from behind, the voices behind it were startling. He turned around, and saw that it was two middle aged Taoists standing at the entrance to the mount; their eyes fixed on him, their faces with a furious expression. They were taking great interest in the stone slab and wanted to take a closer look at the two. The

Taoists took a glance and then moved. Guo Jing saw that their steps were light; they possessed martial arts. He thought that since Mount Zhongnan is not far; the places around here should be filled with people from the Chongyang Palace. The two Taoists were about forty, and were the students of the Quanzhen Seven Masters. For as long as Guo Jing had lived on Peach Blossom Island in seclusion, he hadn't sent news to Ma Yu. He wasn't familiar with the students of Quanzhen, and only knew that Quanzhen had become famous so that Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji, Wang Chu must have accepted many students. Their name in Wulin had become increasingly famous; they had done heroic deeds, solved troubles and disasters, done countless good deeds. Whenever someone hears the name Quanzhen in Wulin, they could only admire it. He wanted to ascend the mount and greet Qiu Chuji, and it was luck that he could be accompanied by two of their students.

He stepped up his pace to the entrance of the mountain, only to see the two Taoists step up their pace to about one hundred feet in front of him, not turning back. Guo Jing called out, "Please wait Taoist brothers, I have a request." His voice was clear and strong, his voice could be heard near and far but the two Taoists did not stop but sped up again. Guo Jing thought, "Could those two be deaf?" He increased his efforts and within a few steps his was in front of them. He turned around and said, "Greetings." He said this while carrying the luggage.

The two saw how swift his movements were and their faces changed. They saw he was carrying luggage, and thought he was going to circulate his chi and ambush them so they took a few steps and one evaded right, the other left then turned around and asked, "Who are you?"

Guo Jing said, "Are you two the students of Mount Zhongnan's Chongyang Palace?"

The leaner of the Taoist replied, "Why are you here?"

Guo Jing said, "I'm an old friend of elder Qiu, I've come to see him, sorry for the trouble."

The other shorter Taoist replied, "If you've the nerve go, why don't you move!" As he said this he struck out a palm quickly. Guo Jing had to move right to avoid it. The two Taoists moved into position immediately after the palm moving left and right, wanting to attack together. Guo Jing was cut off in the middle. The two moves were called "Cutting off the Door". It was the refined skills of the Quanzhen sect, how would Guo Jing not know it? He saw that the two Taoists did not ask for an explanation and had already used force to try to harm him. He was slightly startled, wondering whether there was a misunderstanding, he didn't try to clear it up, nor did he try to evade as he heard two sounds, as two palms landed on the side of his body from the two Taoists.

From the two palms, Guo Jing already knew how strong they were. Guo Jin felt that the two Taoists internal energy was able, confirming that they were the students of Seven Masters of Quanzhen, and thought that he could be classed in the same generation as them. When the two palms were coming at him, Guo Jing had already circulated his chi for defense so all he needed to do was bring his internal strength up to the right level and he wouldn't be hurt. But he also didn't return the power in the palms, causing the Taoists palms to hurt and swell. It wasn't serious; after some initial pain the feeling dissipated.

The Taoists had practiced that move for ten years, but the move didn't even seem to affect him one bit, and they were astonished. They both gave a whistle; they leapt up and ferociously kicked out at Guo Jing's chest. Guo Jing thought this was odd, "The students of Quanzhen have been taught

the values of Taoism, and they treat people with great respect, why have these students started to use violence for no reason?"

He saw that the two used "The Mandarin Duck's Looping Kick" (yuan yang lian huan tui) set of stances, but still his face did not change and he ignored the attack. He heard numerous crashing sounds as several footprints were left on his chest. The Taoists kicked out six times in all, as if they were kicking a sand bag. They relaxed only to see the enemy motionless, not even being harmed one bit. They were astonished since they had attacked harder than last time by several levels. They thought, "How come this crook is so powerful? Even our teacher and his apprentice brothers do not have this amount of skill." They carefully studied Guo Jing; he had dense eyebrows and large eyes, a sturdy body, clothed in rough clothes, like a villager, he had no intention of leaving and stood there, without making a sound.

Yang Guo saw that the Taoists were punching and kicking Uncle Guo but Guo Jing did not retaliate. He couldn't stand it and shouted out, "You two smelly Taoists, why are you hitting Uncle Guo?"

Guo Jing quickly said, "Guo'er, keep your mouth shut. Come over here and greet the two Taoist brothers."

Yang Guo walked forwards and thought, "What's the matter with you Uncle Guo, why are you protecting them?"

The two Taoists gave each other a glance, and after two "sha" noises, they withdrew their swords from their waists. The short Taoist used the stance "Scour the Ocean to Slaughter the Dragon" (tan hai tu long) and aimed for Guo Jing's lower body, the other used "Starry Wind Sweeping Leaves" (gang feng sao ye) and aimed to cut down Yang Guo's right leg.

Guo Jing did not pay attention to the sword that was coming in at him, but instead looked at the skinny Taoist who was unleashing a lethal move and thought, "The child has not done anything to you, so why such a lethal move? How can it be that the sword is aiming to cut his leg in half?" He then moved his body, his left hand placed on the short Taoist's sword handle, "Smoothly Pushing the Boat", and lightly pushed to the left. The short Taoist turned his sword around involuntarily, and after a clashing sound, the skinny Taoist's sword was intercepted, stopping his stance. Guo Jing used the enemy to fight the enemy, the move coming from the "Empty Hands Entering A Hundred Blades" set of kung fu, right now there are only two enemies, even if there was eight or ten people attacking at once, he could still use the enemy's knife to attack the enemy's sword, the enemy's spear against the enemy's whip, utilizing the enemy to attack the enemy, one beating many.

The two Taoists felt their wrists were getting numb, and starting to feel pain; they slanted their bodies and jumped away, turning their bodies. They stared at Guo Jing, frightened but also admiring him at the same time, they whistled out again and their swords were thrust out, once again.

Guo Jing thought, "You two have just learned the "Big Dipper Formation". Though it is a higher set of sword skills, there are only two of you, your foundation for sword skills is not yet good enough, what use is it?"

Afraid that their swords would strike Yang Guo, he moved his body and evaded the two swords, and picked up Yang Guo with his right hand. He shouted out, "I am elder Qiu's old friend; there is no need for this."

The skinny Taoist said, "Even if you are elder Mao Chongma's old friend it wouldn't matter."

Guo Jing said, "Indeed; Elder Ma has taught me kung fu as well."

The short Taoist angrily replied, "You lying crook; the next thing you are going to tell me is that ancestor Yang has taught you kung fu." They straightened their swords and aimed for Guo Jing's chest.

Guo Jing saw that the two did belong to Quanzhen sect, but he could not believe that they are treating him as an enemy. His relationship with the Seven Masters of Quanzhen wasn't anything ordinary, and he wanted Yang Guo to learn martial arts at Chongyang Palace; he couldn't be rude to the Palace's Taoists so he just evaded and did not attack.

The two Taoist were frightened. They had known long ago that their opponent was superior to them, and they wouldn't be able to hit him, so they made a hand signal, and changed their sword style. They sent out many strokes, now all aimed at Yang Guo's chest, sides and back. Every stance they used was intended to kill.

Guo Jing saw that Taoists did not hold anything back with their sword strokes towards a child; he couldn't hold back his anger for any longer. The short Taoist came in with a ferocious stroke, Guo Jing suddenly shot out his right hand; the first and second fingers opened, and held the blade of the sword. He twisted his wrist inwards, his elbow now facing the short Taoist's nose. The short Taoist used his strength to pull free, but couldn't move his long sword, he saw that Guo Jing's elbow coming towards him, and knew that if he didn't die from it he would be seriously hurt so he let go and jumped back.

Guo Jing's martial arts were at a level where he could do what he wanted. It didn't matter if he lifted his hand or raised his foot; the result would be the same. He moved the fingers of his right hand, the sword now stood erect, the handle

flicking upwards. The skinny Taoist was aiming for Yang Guo's neck, his sword tip was struck but the sword handle moved, and after a clashing sound, his right arm grew hot, his body was shaking and he could do nothing but let go.

The two said together, "The perverted scoundrel is too powerful, let's get away!" They turned around as they said this.

Guo Jing had been insulted many times in his life, he has been called, "fool", "idiot", even a "crook", but this is the first time that someone has called a perverted scoundrel. He didn't put Yang Guo down, carrying him he hurried after the two, after one step with his right foot, he leapt over the two Taoists then he turned around and shouted, "What did you call me?"

The short Taoist was frightened, but managed to say, "If you don't want to marry the one named Long, then why have you come to Mount Zhongnan?" As he was speaking, he was afraid that Guo Jing would attack and retreated three steps at the same time.

Guo Jing stopped and thought, "I want to marry the one named Long, who is this girl named Long? Why do I want to marry her? I've already have Rong'er, why would I want to marry someone else?" He stood there as he thought about what was going on. The two Taoists saw that he was standing still, he seemed to be distracted; they glanced at each other and quickly ran past him, hurrying up the mountain.

Yang Guo saw that Guo Jing was not fully aware; he lightly came down to the ground and said, "Uncle Guo, the two smelly Taoists have escaped."

Guo Jing woke from his daydream and grunted, before saying, "They said I wanted to marry the girl named Long, who is she?"

Yang Guo said, "I don't know, the two didn't even try to clear things up before using force, they must thought you were another person."

Guo Jing smiled, "It must be, how come I didn't think of that? Let's go up the mountain!"

Yang Guo picked up the two swords that the two Taoists abandoned. Guo Jing looked at the sword handle; "Chongyang Palace" was imprinted on the handle. The two went on their way. After about an hour they came to the Golden Lotus Chamber and without stopping carried on through the rugged terrain. They stepped on some loose rocks as they reached Mao Yuan Cliff (Hanging Brave Cliff), then the two ascended up it. As they passed the Sun and Moon Cliff (ri yue), the sky was getting dark; when they got to Holding Son Cliff (bao zi), the new moon came out. The appearance of the Holding Son Cliff was peculiar, like a mother holding her son. The two traveled for a while, before Guo Jing said, "Guo'er, are you tired?"

Yang Guo shook his head and said, "No."

Guo Jing said, "Okay, we'll continue on our way."

They walked on, only to see a large rock formation blocking their way. The impression of the rocks was like being in a haunted forest, with one looking like an old woman bending over them. Yang Guo was slightly frightened, and then heard a sound from behind the rock, and four Taoists leapt out, blocking the way and standing motionless.

Guo Jing placed the luggage in front of him and said, "I am Peach Blossom Island's Guo Jing, and I am here to see elder Qiu."

A tall Taoist stepped forward and chuckled, "Hero Guo is known by everyone, he is also senior Huang's son in law; how

can you be so shameless and pretend to be him? Leave quickly!"

Guo Jing thought, "How am I shameless?" He held his temper and said, "I am indeed Guo Jing, could you request elder Qiu to sort this matter out."

The tall Taoist retorted, "You've come to Mount Zhongnan with force, you must be tired of your life. I don't care how powerful you are, you are incapable of reaching Chongyang Palace." As he was speaking the short and skinny Taoist thrust out a sword, and as soon as he finished his sentence he stepped up, ran along the peak of the rock and used the "Separating the Flower, Brushing Away the Willow" (fen hua fu liu) aiming at Guo Jing's waist.

Guo Jing thought, "I haven't been in Jianghu for ten years, have the rules changed?"

He moved his body to evade the strike, and as he was about to speak, the other three Taoists extended their swords, surrounding Guo Jing and Yang Guo.

Guo Jing said, "What can I do to convince you four that I am Guo Jing?"

The tall Taoist snorted, "If you could remove my sword from my grasp." As he said this, he performed another move, this time the sword heading straight for the chest. The sword that was coming at him was light, the tip of the sword swaying. It wasn't like an ordinary sword hacking downward and he wasn't showing any respect to Guo Jing; he performed this move casually.

Guo Jing chuckled and thought, "How hard will it be to remove your sword?" As he saw the tip coming towards him, he held his second finger with his thumb and flicked out at the sword tip, after a "weng" noise, the Taoist couldn't hold

on to the sword, and sword was released in midair. Guo Jing didn't wait for the sword to come down, three more flicks followed by three "weng" noises, and the handles of the other three long swords were up in the air, the blades brightly shining in the moonlight.

Yang Guo shouted out, "Are you convinced now?" Normally Guo Jing would aim to keep the opponent standing, but he was offended by the tall Taoist's lack of respect in his stance so he used the "Divine Flicking Finger" skill. This was Huang Yaoshi's most refined skill; Guo Jing had lived on Peach Blossom Island for a few years and was taught it by him. His internal energy is profound and when he used the skill; it was something out of the ordinary.

The four Taoist's swords were forced from their hands, and they didn't know what move the enemy used to do this. The tall Taoist shouted, "The scoundrel uses witchcraft, let's leave." As he said this he jumped behind the Old Woman Cliff, and hurriedly escaped. The other three followed and disappeared into the night.

Today, Guo Jing heard someone call him a "scoundrel" for the first time, and now someone said he uses witchcraft; he didn't know whether to be angry or to laugh. He said, "Guo'er, place the swords neatly on a rock near the path."

Yang Guo said, "Yes." He picked up the swords, and along with the two he was holding, placed them on a green rock. He was in awe of Guo Jing's skills, his mouth wanted to open up and say the words, "Uncle Guo, I don't want to learn from the smelly Taoists, I want to learn from you." Then he remembered all the events of Peach Blossom Island and he swallowed the words.

The two turned around two bends and eventually wound up at what seemed to be a large area of wilderness. Suddenly, the sound of weapons unsheathing could be heard; seven

Taoists leapt out from the pine forest, each one holding a long sword.

Guo Jing saw that they had leapt into a formation, four to the left of him, three to the right; it was the “Big Dipper Formation”. His heart shivered, and thought, “There will be some difficulty in facing this formation.” He didn’t dare to be over confident, and quietly whispered to Yang Guo, “Go back to the rock behind us and wait for me there, go as far as possible so I won’t be hindered by looking out for you.”

Yang Guo nodded. He didn’t want them to look weak in front of Taoists, so he loosened his pants and called out, “Uncle Guo, I’m going to the toilet.” After he said this, he turned around and hurried to the rock. Guo Jing was pleased, “The child is very clever, catching up to Rong’er, but I hope he goes on the righteous path and learns well.”

Guo Jing turned around to face the seven Taoists. The seven had their backs facing the moon, he couldn’t see their faces that clearly, but he saw that the first six had long beards, they were not young, the seventh was smaller, and his age must be lower compared to the others. He thought, “The most important thing is to go up the mountain and explain any misunderstanding to elder Qiu, why should I tangle with these people?” He shifted his body, and shimmied to the left, assuming the “Northern Star Position”.

The seven didn’t hear him say anything, only seeing him hurriedly moving to the left, and didn’t know what he was up to. The Taoist in the “Tian Quan” position whistled, ordering the six others to the left, wanting to encircle Guo Jing. Guo Jing knew they would move together so he moved right two steps to force the enemy to move again, still assuming the “Northern Star Position”. The Taoist in the “Tian Quan” position wanted three of them to attack, but saw Guo Jing’s position was strange; the three of them weren’t able to

attack him. Instead, the seven of them were open to attack; the seven weren't able to defend each other and each of them suffered a sudden attack. Their left hands waved, and then they turned their formation around. As they were moving their feet, Gou Jing moved two steps forward maintaining the "Northern Star Position", spreading the position of the "Big Dipper Formation". The seven were in an ineffective position; it was hard for them to attack and hard for them to defend.

The "Big Dipper Formation" was the Quanzhen sect's highest kung fu. At its most refined state, when seven people of extremely high martial arts combined together, it could be said that it has no match under heaven. Guo Jing knew the essence of the formation; only by assuming the "Northern Star Position" was he able to drive the position, and control its movements, not allowing it freedom. However, because the seven of them weren't fluent with the formation it allowed him to do this. If it was Ma Yu, Qiu Chui Ji who was controlling the formation, the enemy would not be allowed to so easily to assume the "Northern Star Position". The seven of them changed positions a few times, Guo Jing dominated the formation and he didn't make a sound, just concentrating on maintaining the important position.

The Taoist in the "Tian Shu" (Hanging Sky) position was experienced and noticed that something wasn't right and called, "Change formation!" The seven Taoists scattered, heading right and swerving left, hurrying from east to west, wanting to jumble up the formation, trying to confuse the enemy. After a short while, the seven Taoists were in formation again. The Taoists had changed positions amongst themselves, and now they had moved from a western position to a southeast position where they arranged the formation. Once they were in position, the Taoists in the "Tian Xuan" (Jade Sky) and "Yu Heng" (Weighing Jade) positions pointed their swords and rushed forward, seeing the enemy

in a northern position from their rearrangement, his feet motionless and his palms uneven, a smile crept upon their faces. However they suddenly realized, "If us two go and rush forward, the positions "Kai Yang" (Opening Sun) and the "Tian Xuan" (Jade Sky) will be in great danger." As they stopped, the Taoist in the "Tian Shu" shouted out, "Don't attack, quickly retreat!" After a motionless while, the startled Taoist in the "Tian Quan" position ordered the other six to change formation.

Yang Guo didn't understand, only seeing the Taoists moving around wildly. Guo Jing would either move east, west, south or north a few steps, the seven Taoists still could not unleash even half a move. The more he watched, the more interested he became, and suddenly Guo Jing clapped his palms together shouting, "Apologies!" and moved left two steps.

The "Big Dipper Formation" was now in Guo Jing's control, and he rushed to the left. If the seven Taoists didn't follow, their backs will be exposed with no way to defend. In martial art terms this was extremely serious and ominous so the seven Taoists had no choice but to follow to the left. After a while, the seven Taoists fell into Guo Jing's trap, unable to hold the formation. When Guo Jing ran fast, the seven Taoists ran fast, when Guo Jing slowed down, the seven Taoists slowed down. The young Taoist had the weakest internal energy and after being forced to circle around over ten times in an urgent manner by Guo Jing, his head spun and his breathing was ragged. He felt like he could collapse at any minute but he knew that if the "Big Dipper Formation" had one less person, the whole formation would break down; he could only grind his teeth and exert all his energy to hold on.

Guo Jing wasn't young, but since he had lived on the island with Huang Rong and he had little contact with the outside world, he had lost little of the young Guo Jing. When he saw the seven Taoists were rushing around amusingly he thought,

“Today I have suffered insults for no reason at all; not only did they call me a perverted scoundrel, they said I used witchcraft. I didn’t use any witchcraft for you to see; then doesn’t that mean I’ve been insulted in vain?” He then loudly called out, “Guo’er, watch me use some witchcraft!” He suddenly leapt up to the tall rocks. The seven Taoists were under Guo Jing’s control, they of course had to follow; if they didn’t follow, the weakness of the formation will be revealed. As a few of them hesitated, the Taoist in the “Tian Quan” position quickly ordered everyone to leap up, bringing the formation onto the cliff. Before their legs had steadied themselves, Guo Jing swiftly moved onto the top of a pine tree. Although they were at a distance from each other, it was neither too far nor too close; he was still maintaining the “Northern Star Position” and it would be convenient for him to attack from above.

The seven Taoists all secretly feared the worst and thought, “Where on earth did this tyrant appear from; today our sect will lose face.” With these thoughts in their minds, they couldn’t afford to stop and each one leaped up to a tree branch.

Guo Jing laughed, “Come down!” He leapt down from the tree and stretched out his hand towards the Taoist in the “Kai Yang” position and grabbed his leg.

The strongest aspect of the “Big Dipper Formation” is being able to respond from the left and right, mutually aiding each other. As Guo Jing attacked the “Kai Yang” position, the “Yao Guang” (moving light) and “Yu Heng” position could not come down and help. If the two did come down, the “Tian Shu” and “Tian Quan” positions would have to come down with them; the whole formation will be pulled down. Yang Guo was watching closely from the side, being surprised endlessly, thinking, “If I could reach the level of Uncle Guo in the future, I wouldn’t mind suffering a lifetime of hardships.”

But then he changed his thoughts, "How can I ever achieve the level that he is at? Only Guo Fu and the Wu brothers have that sort of luck. Uncle Guo knew that the rotten Taoist's kung fu couldn't compare with his and that is why he sent me here to learn martial arts." The more he thought, the more troubled he became, he almost cried. He turned his head away from Guo Jing battling the seven Taoists. He was still a child, and eventually could not resist turning his head back to the fight.

Guo Jing thought, "By now, you should believe that I am Guo Jing. One mustn't overdo things; it wouldn't look good for elder Qiu." He saw that the Taoists were turning around quickly but he stood still and folded his arms in salute and said, "Taoist brothers, I have offended you many times and apologize, please give way."

The Taoist in the "Tian Quan" position was hot tempered, he saw that the opposition was highly skilled, knew the "Big Dipper Formation" and assumed he had nothing but evil intent towards his sect. He clearly shouted, "Scoundrel, you've carefully studied our sect's formation, your intent is ruthless. You've come to Mount Zhongnan to cause trouble, our Quanzhen sect regards all evil as our enemy, and we can't wait around and do nothing."

Guo Jing was startled, and asked, "How have we caused trouble?"

The "Tian Shu" Taoist added, "Judging from your kung fu, you do not belong with the dirty scoundrels. I can give you some advice; you better leave the mountain quickly." His tone reflected his respect of Guo Jing's skills.

Guo Jing said, "I have come from thousand of miles to the south up here to the north; I have a matter which I want to discuss with elder Qiu. If I can't see the elder, then how can I leave?"

The “Tian Quan” Taoist said, “You persist on seeing elder Qiu, what do you want?”

Guo Jing said, “I am in the debt of elder Ma and elder Qiu. I haven’t seen them in ten years and long to see them. Apart from paying my respects, I also have another matter to request of them.”

The “Tian Quan” Taoists hate for the enemy increased when he heard this; his face changed colour as if he had something on say. In the world of Jianghu, the words debt and revenge are not looked upon lightly. Sometimes when one has made enemies and they say they have come to pay their debts, in reality they have come for revenge. The Taoist said, “Twenty years ago I chopped off someone’s upper arm, the debts that I have to pay cannot be forgotten? Today I am going to receive what I am owed.”

A request in these cases seems to have evil intent, and after being beaten by someone stronger, they would normally reply, “We brothers are short of food and clothing, and want the old man to help, to spare us some money.” But today, Quanzhen sect is facing enemies and the “Tian Quan” Taoist knew this. Guo Jing’s polite words were turned around and interpreted the other way by the Taoist, and he calmly said, “I’m afraid that my defeated teacher elder Yu Yang is also indebted to you.”

As Guo Jing heard this, he remembered the events years ago at King Zhao’s palace, Yuyang Zi Wang Chu wasn’t concerned about danger, and faced a number of enemies and helped to save his life, his debts to him were not trivial. He said, “So Taoist brother is under the teaching of elder Yuyang. Elder Wang has also been kind to me, if he is at the palace, then that will be good.”

The seven Taoists were all disciples of elder Wang and after hearing this they extended their swords. The seven swords

were all moving at the same time towards Guo Jing's body. Guo Jing raised his eyebrows; the more respectful he was, the fiercer the enemy's reaction, he didn't know what the reasons were for this. It is a pity that Huang Rong was not here; if she was she could sort out the misunderstanding in the blink of an eye. He slanted his body and moved forwards, and stood in the "Northern Star Position". In a clear voice he said, "I am Jiangnan's Guo Jing, I have no evil intent on this sacred mountain, how can I make you believe me?"

The "Tian Quan" Taoist said, "You have already removed six swords from Quanzhen sect's students, can you take our seven swords?" The Taoist in the "Tian Xuan" position had not said anything so far, he broke his silence and said, "Scoundrel, you have come here for the girl called Long, does that mean you think its good for you to provoke our sect?"

Guo Jing said, "Who is this girl named Long, I have never seen her before."

The "Tian Xuan" Taoist laughed and said, "Of course you have not seen her. What man under heaven knows her? If you've got guts, loudly insult her and call her a little bitch."

Guo Jing was startled, he didn't know who this Long girl is so how can he, for no reason, slander her? He said, "Why should I insult her?"

Three or four Taoists said at the same time, "Why don't you confess?"

The Taoists had accused Guo Jing innocently, the more he heard, the stranger it sounded. He thought that if he breaks into Chongyang Palace and sees elder Ma, elder Qiu and Wang Chu, everything would become clear. He calmly said, "I must go up to the mountain, if everyone here tries to stop me, don't blame me for offending you."

The seven Taoists extended their swords, and leapt forward two steps. The “Tian Xuan” Taoist loudly said, “Don’t use your witchcraft, we will just use our kung fu to compete.”

Guo Jing smiled, he had already thought of something, and said, “I want to use some witchcraft. You watch, my hands will not touch your weapons, but I will still be able to take your long swords out of your hands.”

The seven Taoists all looked at each other; their faces had a look of disbelief, and thought, “Although your skills are high, can it be that without using your hands you can rid us of our weapons? Even if you’ve reached the peak of “Empty Hand Entering a Hundred Blades” kung fu, you still need your hands.”

The “Tian Shu” Taoist said, “Fine, we will see how good your kicking kung fu is.”

Guo Jing said, “I will also not use my legs. If I touch your weapons with my hands or legs, then I admit defeat. I will turn around and immediately leave, never entering your sacred mountain again.”

The Taoists heard his wild claims, and they mulled over it. The “Tian Quan” Taoist waved his sword, and led the formation.

Guo Jing slanted his body and rushed forward, again assuming the “Northern Star Position”, ready to move to the left of the “Big Dipper Formation”. The “Tian Quan” Taoist knew they would be in danger and led the formation quickly to the right. Whenever two enemies fight each other, they must face the opposition, if the opponent moves behind you, turning around to face your enemy is something that shouldn’t be done. Right now, Guo Jing was heading for this position, wanting to aim for the back of the formation; he didn’t need to attack. The seven Taoists would have to move

the formation and attack, so that they could face each other. But Guo Jing just kept on heading left, and didn't turn back. Sometimes he would move fast, sometimes slow, sometimes straight and sometimes in a crisscross, but he kept on hurrying to the left. He was in the "Northern Star Position"; the seven Taoists could do nothing but follow him to the left.

The more he hurried, the quicker he became; eventually his speed surpassing that of a horse, his form a blur, he had ran for tens of feet. The seven Taoist's kung fu was not ordinary; although they were facing adversity they managed to stay in formation. The "Tian Shu", "Tian Xuan", "Tian Ji" (Sky Pearl), "Tian Quan", "Yu Heng", "Kai Yang", and "Yao Guang" Taoists held their positions, but they were being forced to hurry around not of their own accord.

Guo Jing could not help but think, "Sure enough, the students of Quanzhen are not ordinary." He took a deep breath, and increased his speed; it appeared that his legs were not even touching the ground.

At first the Taoists could just about manage to keep up by exerting all their strength, but as time passed, the difference in each one's lightness kung fu could be seen. The "Tian Shu", "Tian Quan" and "Yu Heng" Taoist's lightness kung fu was the highest, and they moved quickly, the others slowly fell behind and the "Big Dipper Formation" cracked. They were all afraid and thought, "If the enemy attacks the formation now, I'm afraid we will not be able to defend." They couldn't keep up with him, and could only use their internal energy to try to go around and hit him.

One game that children play is sling throwing. A rock is threaded onto a string, spun around and then at its fastest point, the sling is released, the stone taking the string with it faraway. At the moment, the formation was winding around hurriedly, it was similar to a sling spinning around, the seven

Taoists were scurrying around Guo Jing, their swords held above their heads, the faster they went, the harder it was for them keep the sword still. It was as if a strong force was pulling the swords outwards, wanting to pull the swords out of their grasp.

Suddenly, Guo Jing shouted out, "Let go!" as he flew away to the left. The seven Taoists were caught unaware, and could only follow him quickly. They didn't know what happened as the seven swords flew out of their hands, like seven silver snakes, and flew into the surrounding pine forest. Guo Jing stopped, and laughed as he returned.

The seven Taoist's faces were grey, and stood there without moving, but each one was still holding their position, the formation still held. Guo Jing saw that after being forced to hurry and rush around madly, they still kept the formation and didn't allow it to get out of shape and he knew they spent a lot of time practicing their skills. The "Tian Quan" Taoist gave a sigh of resignation and the seven Taoists escaped behind a cliff.

Guo Jing called out, "Guo'er, let's go up the mountain." He called out twice, but there was no reply. He searched around, but he couldn't see him anywhere but behind a tree he saw a small shoe. Guo Jing swallowed, "Besides the seven Taoists there was another one hiding nearby, he must have taken him away." But then he thought that the group of Taoists had just mistaken him for someone else, and though they had a misunderstanding, the Quanzhen sect has always been righteous and done good. They would never dare to harm a small child; there was no need to be alarmed. He then took a breath, and hurried up the mountain. He had resided on Peach Blossom Island for ten years, though he practiced martial arts every day, he has not faced an enemy for a very long time, and sometimes he felt lonely. Today, having fought

with a crowd of people and being able to respond to every move, he could not help but be satisfied.

The mountain was now rugged and steep. Sometimes he had to lean his body over to pass an obstruction, and after traveling for less than half an hour, the moon was covered and the mountain became dark. Guo Jing thought, "I don't know these paths well and these Taoists are sneaky, I must be on my guard." He then eased up and slowly made his way.

Another while passed and the moon came out again, the mountain lit up, he had only one thing on his mind. Suddenly he heard the breathing sounds of a crowd of people coming from nearby. Though the sounds were quiet, there were many people; Guo Jing had already noticed this. Guo Jing tightened his belt, and turned to the path. In front of him was a large plain, the four sides surrounded by the mountain, at the foot of the mountain was a large pond, and the surface of the water reflected the moon, the silver light shimmering. In front of the pond were about one hundred Taoists, wearing yellow hats and dressed in grey gowns, a long sword in their hands, the swords shone brightly to the eye.

Guo Jing looked on, the crowd was made up of groups of seven, and formed fourteen sets of the "Big Dipper Formation". Each group of seven sets of the "Big Dipper Formation" formed one single large "Big Dipper Formation". From the "Tian Shu" to the "Yao Guang", the force of them was extraordinary. The two large "Big Dipper Formations" were different from each other, one normal, one odd, opposing each other, forming the angle of a wing. Guo Jing gasped, "I have never heard of this type of "Big Dipper Formation" from elder Qiu, presumably this formation has been created within the last few years. Compared to the original one that ancestor Yang created, this is another level." He slowly made his way forward.

He heard a whistle from a person within the formations, ninety-eight Taoists scattered, moving forwards and backwards, the formations changed irregularly, and circled Guo Jing. Each one pointed their swords to the ground; their eyes fixed on Guo Jing and didn't make a noise.

Guo Jing folded his hands in salute and turned around once and said, "I have sincerely entered this sacred mountain to meet elder Ma, elder Qiu and elder Wang, I plead with you please do not block my way."

A long bearded Taoist from the formations said, "Our guest here has excellent martial arts, so why do you not use it for good, instead of causing trouble with the evil ones? I offer you some good advice: a woman can cloud someone's mind and your skills that you have trained hard for over the last ten years could be threatened and lost in a single day. Our Quanzhen sect has never met you, and we have no quarrels, so why have you come to our mountain and caused so much trouble over this witch? If you leave immediately now, we could still meet again another day." He spoke with a deep voice, but every word was crystal clear, it was clear that his internal energy was profound, his advice was sincere.

Guo Jing was angry but was also laughing, he thought, "I don't know whom the Taoists have mistaken me for, if Rong'er was by my side, then there wouldn't be any of this misunderstanding. He said, "I know nothing of being clouded by women or witches, if you allow me to see elder Ma, elder Qiu and elder Wang, then everything will become clear."

The long bearded Taoist coldly said, "You still do not heed the advice and persist on wanting to see elder Ma and elder Qiu and try out your skills on them, well first you are going to have to break our large 'Big Dipper Formation'."

Guo Jing replied, "I am only one person, my skills are of a low level, how could I dare come up against your sect's greatest

skill? Please release the child that came with me, and allow me to see your sect's master and elder Qiu."

The long bearded Taoist shouted out, "You have come here, caused trouble, and put on a show in front of Mount Zhongnan's Chongyang Palace; how can we let such a scoundrel be so rude." As he said this, he waved his sword in the air, the blade pierced the wind, the sound of the blade lingered. The crowd of Taoists waved their long swords, ninety-eight blades swept across, a wind was created, and the swords resembled a shiny net.

Guo Jing was secretly worried, "The two large formations are the opposite of each other; how can I maintain the "Northern Star Position" by myself? Today's matter is really troublesome."

Before Guo Jing made up his mind, the ninety-eight Taoists merged together from the left and right, the light from the swords weaved about, he was trapped like a fly and it would be difficult to escape. The long bearded Taoist said, "Pick up a weapon! Quanzhen sect will not harm an empty handed person."

Guo Jing thought, "This formation may be hard to break, but you may still not be able to harm me. The formation has many people, its power great, but each one's skill varies. There will definitely be a weakness; I'll study this formation first before I decide on anything." He slowly turned around, and then quickly moved in a northwest direction and used the "Eighteen Subduing Dragon Palms", the stance "Hidden Dragon Has No Use" (qian long wu yong), one palm out and one in, as he pushed off against the ground. Seven young Taoists swapped their swords into their left hand, each one joining together and stretched out their right palm, using their strength to repel his palm. The palm skill that Guo Jing used had been practiced and refined, and has now reached

its peak; the force he generated was extremely strong, and he had more powerful moves hidden. Each one of them used all their strength to block this fierce attack but they didn't expect a strong force pulling them forward. The seven could not stand still, and all of them fell onto the ground; though they got up straight away, each one of them had dirt on their face, and was slightly embarrassed.

The long bearded Taoist saw that Guo Jing had unleashed a powerful stance; in just one move he had caused seven Taoists to fall onto the ground, he was slightly frightened. He gave a whistle and led the fourteen "Big Dipper Formations" and merged them. Even if the enemy's palm strength was ten times stronger, it would be difficult for him to push away ninety-eight people.

Guo Jing remembered the battle that he had on Jun Mountain (Lord Mountain); he and Huang Rong were battling the beggar clan, although individually they were weak, but once they united they were hard to defend against. He didn't dare to use force to overcome them; he could only use his lightness kung fu and escape from the formation, and try to find its weakness.

He hurried to the east and leapt to the west, and drew the formation with him, in just a short while he realized that if he wanted to break the formation by himself, it would be a difficult task made harder. One, he didn't want to hurt anyone; two, the formation's defense was second to none. There wasn't a single weakness; thirdly, Guo Jing is not the most astute person; the formation changed quickly so even if there was a weakness, he would not pick it up in such a short period of time.

Under the light of the full moon, the light from the swords resembled water, the scene like a wave, there was no point in trying to run away again.

They fought for a period of time, the formation was getting tighter, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to dodge within the gaps. Guo Jing thought, "Why don't I rush through the formation and make a dash for Chongyang Palace and see elder Ma and elder Qiu?" He raised his head and faced west; he saw there were twenty or thirty buildings and a few of them had large open spaces. He thought that Chongyang Palace must be one of them; he then hurried rapidly to the east, and after a few leaps, he turned and ran towards the west.

The multitude of Taoists saw that he was increasing in speed; a grey blur was within the formation like a falling star rushing through the sky. It was almost impossible to see where he was, they were dazzled or dazed, and they slowed down. The long bearded Taoist called out, "Everyone be careful, don't fall into the scoundrel's trap."

Guo Jing was angry, he thought, "They still call me a scoundrel. If this spreads out throughout Jianghu, how would I be respected again?" He had another thought, "The formation is led by him and if I aim for him, I then could set up a way to break the formation. He separated his palms, and headed straight for the long bearded Taoist. One thing the formation tries to do is to lure the enemy to attack the one leading the formation, each small formation will use this and come from the east and west, the south attacking the north, the enemy would then fall into their trap. Guo Jing rushed seven, eight steps, before he felt something was wrong, the force pressing him from behind suddenly increased, the two sides were flooding in and coming to attack. He turned around and dodged to the right, the two small formations in front of him all attacked with their swords. The fourteen swords were placed so that the enemy will be forced into a harmful position; there was no place to run, no place to hide. Guo Jing was faced with danger all around him, but he did not panic, only his anger began to rise, he thought, "You still

mistake me for some scoundrel, some evil person. Taoists are supposed to be enlightened and merciful, so why is every stance that is used aiming to kill the opponent? Unless you must have my life at all costs? And what is this about? Quanzhen sect never harms an opponent without a weapon?" He slanted his body and escaped, his right leg came out, his left hand came in search of something, he kicked a young Taoist and took his weapon, he saw seven swords came in to his waist from the right, he waved his left hand out, the eight swords clattered, after a sound, each one of the seven swords broke into two pieces, the sword in his hand was still in perfect condition. The sword that Guo Jing took wasn't an especially sharp blade, but because he distributed his chi throughout the sword, he was able to use it to shatter the seven swords.

The seven Taoists gasped, the expression on their faces darkened and they stood still for a while. The two formations at one side came in immediately and raised their swords protecting each other. Guo Jing saw that the fourteen Taoists were using their left hands to hold on to the right shoulder of the Taoist next to them, the fourteen united the energy into one. He thought, "You want to see how strong my internal energy is exactly?" He waved his long sword, and placed the sword onto the fourteenth Taoist's sword.

The Taoist tried to pull away quickly, but the sword in his hand felt as if it were welded to a copper anvil, and was unable to pull it free. The remaining thirteen Taoists circulated their chi, wanting to use the combined force of the fourteen to repel the enemy. Guo Jing wanted them to do this. As soon as he felt the force trying to pull free increase, he shouted out, "Take care!" His right arm rose, after an interlude of sound, twelve swords broke as a result of seemingly pushing against a large object. The remaining two swords flew into the air. The fourteen Taoists gasped and were frightened; they quickly jumped away. Guo Jing secretly

sighed, "My internal energy has yet to reach its peak, but there were still two swords that I was unable to break."

After this, the Taoists became even more wary of him and they were more careful in unleashing their moves. Although twenty-one Taoists had lost their weapons, they resorted to using their palms; they were able to generate a wind force with their palms, and their power was not weak. While Guo Jing was shattering swords, he wasn't able to do what he wanted and now he felt the formation's defense becoming increasingly tighter. He didn't know what new techniques and formations for the "Big Dipper Formation" that elder Ma and elder Qiu had devised. If the enemy had more advanced formations, it would be difficult for him to deal with. He was afraid that he would not be able to escape the clutches of the Taoists, so he decided to act right away and shouted out, "My Taoist brothers, if you still won't give way, then forgive me if I don't hold back."

The long bearded Taoist looked on, he knew that Guo Jing was skilled, and thought that even if Guo Jing was able to shatter all ninety-eight swords, he still wouldn't be able to escape from our formation. When he heard what Guo Jing said, he laughed coldly and did not reply, and made the formation even tighter.

Guo Jing crouched his body against the ground and leaped to the northeast, but he saw the two small formations from the southwest coming towards him. He then pointed his sword towards them. In the blink of eye he had unleashed fourteen moves; all fourteen moves made at the same time and each stance pierced a Taoist's right wrist on the "Positive Valley Point" (yang gu yue). At the highest levels of swordsmanship, the sword is able to move like wind and flash like lightning, every move accurate to the millimeter. It would be no different than fourteen different concealed weapons thrown at the same time. He unleashed the moves lightly, each

Taoist had a numb feeling in their wrist, there were no strength in their fingers; the fourteen swords fell onto the ground. With this shock, the Taoists jumped back quickly, and examined the wounds on their wrists. Each saw the wound on the “Yang Gu Yue” was slightly red but there wasn’t a drop of blood. They knew their opposition had used the sword tip to touch this pressure point only, their skin was not pierced. The Taoists gasped, and thought that although the scoundrel was offensive, he was not ruthless; if he hadn’t held back, he could have harmed our palms without using the slightest effort.

During this time, thirty-five swords had been forced out of their hands. The long bearded Taoist was very angry; Guo Jing had not even used his best kung fu, yet he had already made their sect lose so much face. If he managed to break into the palace, the effects would be disastrous. He then gave out an order, “Defend the formation closely.” He wanted the ninety eight Taoists to surround him, and slowly crowd him to death.

Guo Jing thought, “That Taoist does not know how to repay kindness; it’s unspeakable. I can only teach them a severe lesson.” He hid his left palm, and pushed his right palm to the left. A formation came and faced the palm.

Guo Jing quickly went into the “Northern Star Position”, but another formation came to attack. There were fourteen “Big Dipper Formations”, there were also fourteen “Northern Star Positions”, and Guo Jing had no way to separate himself, and could not stand in all of the fourteen important positions at once. He used his lightness kung fu, as soon as he had stepped in the “Northern Star Position” of one formation, he immediately leapt to another “Northern Star Position”; he did it a number of times and the formations became disorganized.

The long bearded Taoist knew something was wrong and gave out an order quickly; he ordered everyone to scatter and reorganize the formations and keep calm. He knew that if everyone went and chased Guo Jing wildly, the way he was moving, he would definitely create worse disturbances in the formations. But if they didn't move and just held their position, the fourteen "Northern Star Positions" would be far away from each other. Even if Guo Jing was faster, he would not be able to assume every position.

Guo Jing gathered himself and thought, "That Taoist knows the important aspects of the formation and sure enough he saw the danger quickly. Now that they are standing still, I could head for the palace." He then changed his mind, "Actually, better not, elder Ma and elder Qiu are not usually in the palace, otherwise how can it be that I have fought these Taoists for so long and they haven't noticed? He lifted his head towards the palace, and saw sparks flying around in the corner of the building. Someone was fighting with weapons, but because he was far away, he could not see clearly who was fighting and the sounds of the weapons clashing was also too far to hear.

Guo Jing suddenly became alarmed, "Who would have the guts to raise their hands in Chongyang Palace? There must be some reason behind tonight's events." He wanted to rush over there to take a close look, but the fourteen "Big Dipper Formation" came in closer and closer. He was in a rush, and with his left palm he unleashed "Seeing the Dragon in the Field" (jian long zai tian) and with his right he used "Overcoming the Dragon with Regret". He used the "Mutual Left Hand Right Hand Combat" technique to do this, and used two separate attacks to the left and right. He saw that the forty-nine people in the "Big Dipper Formation" on the left were blocking this attack; the other forty-nine people in the other "Big Dipper Formation" on the right also blocked his attack. Before he has finished unleashing the two moves,

he changed them around, the left hand had changed from “Seeing the Dragon in the Field” to “Overcoming the Dragon with Regret”, his right hand changing from “Seeing the Dragon in the Field” to “Overcoming the Dragon with Regret”.

With the “Mutual Left Hand Right Hand Combat Technique”, he was able to do the hard task of using two different stances at the same time, and then to interchange them in the middle of it. This was something that the Taoists have never seen nor heard of. Originally the formation on the left side was able to resist the “Overcoming the Dragon with Regret”, the right was able to resist “Seeing the Dragon in the Field”, when the two stances were swapped around, the Taoists on both sides were resisting, they didn’t know that Guo Jing could swap his stances around so easily. They then saw a flash of movement as Guo Jing escaped from the formation. The forty-nine people on the left and the forty nine people on the right were pushing forward with all their might, and at this moment how could they keep their legs in check? There came a loud noise as the two formations collided with each other, swords wounded some from behind, some knocked their noses against those in front and thirty of them fell onto the ground.

The long bearded Taoist who was leading the formation managed to dodge quickly and evade harm from the other Taoists. He couldn’t bear what had happened and quickly whistled again, rapidly setting up the formation again. He saw that Guo Jing was heading rapidly for the pond at the foot of the mountain, the Yu Qing Pond (Pure Jade). He led the fourteen formations and chased after him. The Quanzhen sect’s kung fu was based on calmness and tranquility, using softness to overcome hardness, letting anger control your actions is breaking one of the major rules of the sect; with his anger and fury, it could be said that he was not considering the enemy carefully, he was just reacting to their actions.

Guo Jing quickly reached the Jade Pond, in front of him the water glistened, as he lifted his sword up with his right hand, and chopped a coarse branch off a willow tree that was by the pond. He threw away the sword and picked up the branch with both arms, and flung it faraway into the pond. He increased the strength in his legs and his body soared into the air, his right foot touched the branch once and it sank, he used it to reach the shore on the other side. The crowd of Taoists rushed to the pond but they couldn't stop in time. A splash followed another, as forty or fifty people fell into the pond. The last ten either stepped onto the back of those who had fallen in or managed to stop themselves. A few of the Taoists couldn't swim, and began to struggle in the pond. Those who could swim hurried over to rescue them. At the Pure Jade Pond, the Taoists made a commotion, as they were drenched with water and mud.

End of Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 - Under the Teaching of Quanzhen Sect

Translated by Noodles



The Jade Bees were like smoke, and were flying onto Guo Jing and Qiu Chu Ji. Qiu Chu Ji circulated chi through his "dan tian", and blew out through his mouth at the bees that were coming towards him. Guo Jing had learnt this type of skill, and then he created a gust of wind. The swarm of bees could not resist and flew past the two.

After Guo Jing escaped from the Taoists, he headed swiftly for Chongyang Palace, when he suddenly heard the ringing of a bell; it was coming from Chongyang Palace. The sound was urgent; it was the alerting signal. Guo Jing turned his head to see what was happening, he saw sparks flying in the air coming from the large courtyard in the back. He thought, "Sure enough, today Quanzhen sect's enemies have arrived, I'd better rush over there to help."

He suddenly heard a crowd behind him rushing up, he then understood, "The Taoists must have mistaken him as a confederate of their enemy. With this danger, no wonder they wanted to fight to the death." He ignored those behind him, and made his way up the mountain.

He used his lightness kung fu, in a flash he had moved over one hundred feet, in less than the time to make a cup of tea; he was already at Chongyang Palace. He saw flames and smoke, the dense smoke was unrestrained, the blaze was fierce, but what was strange was that in Chongyang Palace there were countless Taoists, yet no one had come out and tried to put out the flames.

Guo Jing was afraid. He saw ten Taoist residences empty and untidy about the mountain. The flame in the back courtyard was large, but it had yet to breach into the main courtyard. However, insults could be heard from there, as well as the clashing of weapons. He leapt up onto a roof, and saw a large group of people battling. He stood still and looked on, he saw

that forty-nine Taoists dressed in yellow gowns had formed seven “Big Dipper Formations” and were resisting about one hundred enemies. The enemies were all shape and sizes, tall and short, fat and skinny. According to the way they were dressed and the skills they used, it seems that they are from different sects. Some used weapons, some used their palms, and they all were attacking the “Big Dipper Formation” from all sides. The attackers’ skills weren’t weak, and they were large in number. Eventually the Taoists began to lose. But because the enemy was fighting them separately, the “Big Dipper Formation” allowed them to help each other and were able to defend tightly. Though the opponents were strong, they could still resist them. Guo Jing listened carefully, and heard breathing sounds in the hall; there were people battling there as well. From the sounds of the wind generated by the fists in the hall, the skills of the people battling there were superior to those who were fighting outside. He jumped down from the roof, twisted his body and then made a dash forward. He dodged east and then darted west, and was able to go through the cracks of three “Big Dipper Formations”. The Taoists were alarmed, and tried to follow, but because of the onslaught they were facing, they couldn’t separate and chase him.

Normally the hall would be lit with ten large candles, but because of the flames in the back courtyard, its light overpowered the light from the candles. He saw that there were seven mats lined up on the floor, seven Taoists were sitting on them, the left palm of each joined to the next person, their right palms out, resisting the attacks of ten people around them.

Guo Jing ignored the attackers and first studied the Taoists. He saw that there were three old and four young, the old were Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji and Wang Chuyi, he could only recognize one of the four young Taoists and that was Yin Zhiping. The seven were sitting in the positions of “Tian Shu”

to “Yao Guang” to form the “Big Dipper Formation”; they sat there and didn’t move. In front of the seven was a Taoist lying on the floor, he didn’t know whether he was alive or dead. He saw his hair was white but could not see his face. Guo Jing saw that Ma Yu and the others were in danger, his blood began to boil, he didn’t care who the enemy was and came out in a flash, and shouted , “How dare you scoundrels come and cause trouble in Chongyang Palace?” He stretched out his hands, and grabbed the backs of two attackers, and wanted to throw the attackers out, but he didn’t know that the two were good fighters. Their feet stood firm to the ground, and couldn’t be pulled from the floor. Guo Jing thought, “Where did all these good fighters come from? No wonder the Quanzhen sect feels that today will end in ruin for them.” He let go and swept his legs out. The two were using the “Thousand Kilogram Fall” (qian jin zhui) skill to resist the attacker, but they didn’t predict that he would suddenly change stance, and in a flash, the two soared in midair and crashed through the door.

The attackers saw that powerful help had come for the Taoists and were alarmed; but they were curious and wanted to know his name. Two of them came out and shouted out, “Who are you?” Guo Jing ignored them, two “fu” sounds were heard, as two palms came out. The two were not near Guo Jing’s body, but they were hit by the palm’s power and couldn’t stand still. Two sounds were heard as the men crashed against the wall, blood came out of their mouths. The remaining attackers saw that Guo Jing had wounded four of them in one go, they were frightened, and no one dared to confront him.

Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji and Wang Chuyi recognized who he was and were delighted, and thought, “Now he’s here, our sect will escape danger!”

Guo Jing did not even consider the attackers as he knelt down and kowtowed to Ma Yu and said, "Disciple Guo Jing greets you." Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji and Wang Chuyi nodded and greeted him in return. Yin Zhiping suddenly called out, "Brother Guo, careful!" Guo Jing heard a noise from behind, and knew someone wanted to ambush him from behind. He pushed against the floor with his arm and elbow, his body in the air, and pushed out his knees and hit the two attackers on their "Soul Entrance" (hun men) pressure points. The two of them fell immediately to the floor. Guo Jing remained kneeling down with two mats beneath his knee.

Ma Yu smiled, and said, "Jing'er rise, I haven't seen you in ten years; your skills have improved tremendously!"

Guo Jing got up and said, "I'll let the elder decide on how I should get rid of the others." Before Ma Yu replied, Guo Jing heard two laughs from behind; the laughs were very strange. He turned around, and saw two people standing there. One was wearing a red gown, his head was shiny, his body lanky, and he was a monk. The other wore a light yellow embroidered gown, his hand holding a folded fan. He was dressed like a wealthy man, and was about thirty, his face carrying an arrogant expression. Guo Jing saw that their breathing was measured and deep, and were completely different to the others. He didn't dare to be rash. He asked, "Who are you? Why have you come here?"

The nobleman said, "And who are you? Why have you come here?" His pronunciations weren't exactly correct; he wasn't from the central plains.

Guo Jing said, "I am the disciple of these elders."

The man chuckled, "Who would have thought that there resided a man like this in the Quanzhen sect." He was younger than Guo Jing by a few years, but he spoke with the air of an old man, and with arrogance.

Guo Jing did not regard himself as a true disciple of the Quanzhen sect, but when he heard him speak, he could tell they had a hidden agenda. He didn't want to talk but under these circumstances he had to say something. "What is the story behind your intrusion into the Quanzhen sect? Why have you brought so many people and set the place on fire?"

The man chuckled again, "Since you belong to the lower generation of the Quanzhen sect, how can you speak out."

Guo Jing said, "You have come here and have caused trouble, you have been too reckless." The flames were getting closer, and it wouldn't be long before the main courtyard was set on fire.

The man opened his fan and took a step forward; he laughed and said, "I brought those people along! If you can receive thirty stances of mine, I'll let the old Taoists go, how about that?"

Gou Jing saw that they were in an urgent situation, he couldn't hesitate. He stretched out his right hand, and grabbed the man's fan and pulled it, the man did not let go of the fan, and tried to pull him closer.

With this pull, the man wobbled slightly but he held onto his fan. Guo Jing thought, "This man isn't old; he could actually fend off my pull. The way he circulated his chi was similar to the monk Lingzhi Shangren but compared to Lingzhi Shangren his was more fluid. It appears that he must belong to a sect in the west. The frame of his fan is made of metal, it's actually a weapon." He increased the power in his hands and said, "Let go!" The nobleman's face suddenly turned a shade of purple, but in a second it had disappeared. Guo Jing knew that he had urgently raised his chi to try to resist him; he too increased his strength at the same time. He knew that if the man's face turned purple three times, he would suffer serious internal injuries, but thought that learning this type

of kung fu wasn't an easy task. He didn't want to harm him seriously so he gave a sly smile.

With the fan in his hand, the man's strength began to decrease. Guo Jing had transferred all the power in his palm into the fan and into the opponent's hand, wanting to neutralize the man's energy. The man used all the strength he had accumulated during his life but he couldn't transfer any of it into the fan, and was about to lose hold of it. The man realized that his opponent's skills exceeded his so he kept a calm face, let go of the fan and jumped back. His face was red, and said, "Please allow me to know your famous name."

Guo Jing said, "My name is not worth knowing, just know that elders Ma, Qiu and Wang are my teachers."

The man questioned this, and thought that he had just fought with a bunch of old Quanzhen Taoists. "If they fought one on one and didn't rely on the power of the "Big Dipper Formation", they wouldn't be a match for him, so how could a student of theirs be so good," he took another look at Guo Jing to get the measure of him. His face looked ordinary, his clothes were coarse, he looked just like a villager, but he possessed great skills, he said, "Your skills are alarmingly good, I am in awe, I will come again in ten years time and test myself again. I have some unfinished business so I must leave now." He folded his arms in salute as he said this. Guo Jing held his fist in salute and acknowledged, "We will meet again in ten years time."

The man turned around and started out of the palace. As he reached the door, he said, "This affair between me and the Quanzhen sect, I have decided to resolve at a later date. I hope the members of the Quanzhen sect do not take this personally and come searching for me to settle their own private affairs."

According to the rules of Jianghu, if a person stops pursuing a matter and sets a date later on to resolve it, and the persons involved meet during the time period, they must not settle their issues there and then, they must wait for the agreed date.

Guo Jing heard what he said and replied, "Of course."

The man chuckled and he spoke a few words in Tibetan to the Tibetan monk. As he was about to leave, Qiu Chuji shouted out, "There is no need for a ten year wait, I, Qiu Chuji will come in search for you." His voice shook the tiles of the roof, demonstrating his profound internal energy. When the man heard this, he shivered, and thought, "That old Taoist's internal energy is not weak, when I was fighting them a while back, he wasn't at full strength." He didn't dare linger and quickly dashed through the doors. The Tibetan monk in red stared at Guo Jing with fury, as he and the others left. Guo Jing looked at the men, they were all strange looking, they had high noses and deep eyes, they weren't from the central plains, his suspicions were raised, but he heard the sounds of weapons clashing outside had died down, and knew the enemy was leaving.

The group of seven including Ma Yu stood up, but the old Taoist who was lying on the floor did not get up. Guo Jing took a look, it was Guangzhu Zi Hao Datong. He knew that though the seven were being affected by the fire, but they remained and sat there without moving. They wanted to protect their own people. He saw that his face was golden; his breathing shallow, his eyes were closed and knew that he had suffered a serious internal injury. Guo Jing opened his gown, he gasped as he saw a hand print on his chest, five fingers were spread out, the print was deep purple, it had penetrated inside. He thought, "The enemy's kung fu is indeed from western Tibet, it's the "Great Handprint" skill. Although there is no poison on the palm, the power of it is

much stronger than that of Lingzhi Shangren.” He examined Hao Datong and he was pleased to find that there was still a strong pulse. Hao Datong had practiced martial arts for many years and had built up a high level of internal energy; his life would not be in danger.

The fire from the back courtyard was coming closer. Qiu Chuji picked up Hao Datong and said, “Let’s go!”

Guo Jing said, “Where’s the child that I brought with me? Who took him away? I don’t want him to get harmed by the fire.”

Qiu Chuji and the others were all occupied with fighting the enemy; they didn’t know anything about it. When they heard this they asked, “Whose child is it? Where are they?”

Before Guo Jing could reply, a small dark figure suddenly appeared and jumped down from a beam of the roof. The person laughed and said, “I’m here.” It was Yang Guo.

Guo Jing was delighted, he quickly asked, “Why were you hiding up there?”

Yang Guo chuckled and said, “You are with the seven rotten Taoists.”

Guo Jing scolded, “Shut up! Come here quickly and greet the Grand Masters.”

Yang Guo stuck his tongue in and out of his mouth and kowtowed to Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji and Wang Chuyi, when he reached Yin Zhiping and saw that he was young, he turned his head around and asked, “He’s not a Grand Master is he? I think I don’t have to kowtow anymore.”

Guo Jing said, “That is Martial Uncle Yin, quickly kowtow.” Yang Guo didn’t want to but he still did it. Guo Jing saw him stand up and didn’t kowtow to the other three, he scolded,

“Guo’er, how come you don’t kowtow, have you no manners?”

Yang Guo chuckled and said, “By the time I’ve finished kowtowing, it’ll be too late, don’t blame me.”

Guo Jing asked, “Too late for what?”

Yang Guo replied, “There is a Taoist who is tied up in a room; if we don’t go and save him, I’m afraid he’ll be burned to death.”

Guo Jing urgently asked, “Which room? Quickly tell us!”

Yang Guo pointed to the east and said, “I think it’s over there, I don’t know who tied him up.” He laughed after he said this.

Yin Zhiping gave him a glance, and rushed to the eastern double room, he kicked open the door but saw no one. He then ran to the room where the third generation students cultivate their internal energy and opened the door. The room was full of smoke but he saw a Taoist tied to a column crying out, he was in danger. Yin Zhiping picked up a sword, cut the rope, and rescued the Taoist.

Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji, Wang Chuyi, Guo Jing, Yang Guo and the rest of them left the hall and went up the mountain to a building where they watched the fire. They saw the back courtyard was in flames, the fire lighting up half the sky. There were few sources of water around, only a small spring that was used for everyday purposes; it would be useless to use it to try to put out the fire. They could only look on as the back courtyard was burnt down to ashes. The Quanzhen students worked together to stop the fire from spreading, the other halls and buildings were not harmed. Qiu Chuji was originally blithe and didn’t have a care. But he was also rash

and bad tempered, as he saw the fierce flames, he ground his teeth and cursed.

Guo Jing was about to ask who the enemy were, and why did they respond in this way when he saw Yin Zhiping's right hand was around a large Taoist's waist. He had come out from the smoke and flames. The large Taoist was overcome by smoke and continuously coughed. Tears were in his eyes but when he saw Yang Guo he was furious, and jumped towards him. Yang Guo chuckled and hid behind Guo Jing. The Taoist did not know who Guo Jing was, he stretched out his hand and pushed his chest, wanting to move him out of the way and grab Yang Guo. But it was like pushing a brick wall; he didn't move an inch. The Taoist stopped and pointed to Yang Guo and loudly shouted, "You little bastard, you wanted to kill me!"

Wang Chuyi sternly said, "Jingguang, what are you talking about?"

The Taoist Lu Qingdu was an apprentice grandson of Wang Chuyi; he had barely escaped with his life and he was furious when he saw Yang Guo. He wanted to jump forward and grab him. He ignored the fact the elders were there and only when he heard Wang Chuyi call out once more did he realize he was out of order. He broke out in a cold sweat, he bowed his head and dropped his hands and said, "Disciple deserves to die."

Wang Chuyi said, "What exactly happened?"

Lu Qingdu said, "It's my fault for being useless, I request the elders to punish me."

Wang Chuyi frowned and said, "Who said you were useless? I asked you, what is this about?"

Lu Qingdu replied, "Yes, yes. I was ordered by Master Zhao to guard the back courtyard. After a while, he came back with the little, little..." He wanted to say "Little bastard", but he knew he couldn't act out of order in front of the elders again so he changed his words and said, "little boy and gave him to me, and said he was brought here by a formidable enemy of our sect. Martial Uncle Zhao had captured him and told me to guard him and don't let him escape. So I took him to the eastern meditation room; after a while, he tricked me and said he needed the toilet and wanted me to untie him. I thought that he was just a small kid and wasn't concerned that he would be able to get away so I untied him. I didn't think that he was just sitting on the toilet and pretending to go; when he suddenly got up, picked up the bucket and threw the waste contents at me." When Lu Qingdu got to this point, Yang Guo burst out laughing. Lu Qingdu angrily shouted, "What are you laughing at?"

Yang Guo lifted his head, his eyes towards the sky and said, "I want to laugh; what can you do about it?"

Lu Qingdu wanted to curse back when Wang Chuyi said, "Don't quarrel with the child; continue."

Lu Qingdu said, "Yes, yes. Elder you don't know, but that little boy is very sly and crafty. When I saw the waste coming at me, I quickly dodged out of the way, but he laughed and said "Ah, Mr. Taoist, you've got some on your clothes!"

When the crowd heard him impersonate Yang Guo, his voice sounded funny, the others secretly wanted to laugh. Wang Chuyi frowned; he secretly cursed him for acting this way in front of others.

Lu Qingdu continued, "I was angry, and wanted to go over and beat him, but he raised the bucket and threw it at me. I shouted out "Little bastard" and quickly used "Rapid Flowing Retreat" (ji liu yong tui) and moved out of the way. One of my

feet stepped into the waste but after two wobbles I managed to stay on my feet. I wasn't prepared when the boy took advantage of me while I was unsteady and took my sword from my waist and pointed it at my chest and said if I moved, he would pierce through my chest. I didn't want anything to happen to me so I stood still. The boy held the sword with his left hand and with his right hand tied me up to a column, and then stuffed my mouth with a piece of cloth. Eventually the room caught fire and I couldn't move I couldn't call out; if it wasn't for Martial Uncle Yin, would I not have been burnt to death by that boy?" After he said this, he stared furiously at Yang Guo.

After everyone heard this, they looked at Yang Guo and then looked at the Taoist, one was a small boy, the other a large fat man, they couldn't help but burst out laughing. When Lu Qingdu heard them laugh out loud, he touched his ear and cheek; he didn't know what to do with his hands and feet.

Ma Yu chuckled and said, "Jing'er is he your son? He takes after your wife, very quick and clever."

Guo Jing said, "No, he is my brother Yang Kang's son.

Qiu Chuji shivered when he heard this; he gave Yang Guo two glances and saw that he did indeed look like Yang Kang. Yang Kang was his first official student; he wasn't obedient, yearned for wealth and riches, and acknowledged a scoundrel as his father. Every time Qiu Chuji went over this in his mind, he felt that he was to blame for Yang Kang's behavior. He didn't teach him properly and caused him to turn out like that. When he heard that Yang Kang had an heir, he was sad and delighted at the same time, he quickly asked for the details.

Guo Jing glossed over Yang Guo's situation, and told them he wanted Yang Guo to study under the Quanzhen sect. Qiu

Chuji said, "Jing'er, your martial arts have long exceeded ours, why don't you teach him yourself?"

Guo Jing said, "I will tell you everything later. I have offended a lot of Taoist brothers today on the way here, I'm very sorry, I apologize to all the elders, and I hope you can forgive me. He held his hands together to those Taoists who he had fought.

Ma Yu said, "If you hadn't arrived just in time, our sect would have been destroyed. We are not strangers; there is no need to apologize."

Qiu Chuji's brows rose, and after Ma Yu had finished he said to him, "Zhijing led the formation outside; he couldn't tell the difference between friend and foe. I thought it was strange that there was a strong formation placed outside, but when I looked away for a second the enemy managed to break through and attacked us. Huh, so it was him who led the formation away to try to catch you." His eyes squinted, he was livid; he summoned two disciples to him, and asked how they could mistake Guo Jing for the enemy.

The two disciples were frightened and changed colour, the older of the two said, "Apprentice brothers Feng and Wei ran up to us, and said hero Guo had smashed the stone slab at the "Everywhere Light Temple", and knew that he must have been with the enemy."

Guo Jing remembered the events, and couldn't believe all the misunderstanding arose from that, he said, "You can't blame these Taoist brothers. When I was at the Light Everywhere Temple, I inadvertently slammed down a heavy palm on the stone slab that had your poem on it; it was because of this that the misunderstanding was created."

Qiu Chuji said, "So it was because of this, what a coincidence. We already knew that the enemy would come

today, and they would use the slamming of the rock as a signal.”

Guo Jing said, “Who were they? How come they were so daring?”

Qiu Chuji sighed and said, “It is a long story, Jing’er, come, I am going to show you something.” He then nodded to Ma Yu and Wang Chuyi; he turned around and headed for the back side of the mountain. Guo Jing turned around to Yang Guo and said, “Guo’er, stay here.” He followed Qiu Chuji. He saw him heading around mountain, his steps rapid, like those of a young man.

The two arrived at the peak of the mountain; Qiu Chuji went up to a large stone slab and said, “There are some words written here.”

It was dark; on the back of the large stone were some words. Guo Jing reached out to the back of the stone, and felt that there were some words written on it, he tried to recognize the words, it was a poem: “His will flows under the bridge. Assisting the Han to gain influence, a winding pillar under the sky, wanting to be free to roam, he walked away after succeeding. Raising people and raising books, the price is heavy. Chongyang raised Quanzhen, his wish had been done, the hero’s disposition had gone, clearly marking his separation. Enduring this, the heart lives in a tomb. A person becomes a man of religion, two immortals will meet. Forever on Mount Zhongnan, a mist will linger.” Guo Jing touched the rock and traced the writing with his fingers at the same time, he was startled, the writing matched the strokes of writing with his fingers, it was as if the writing on the rock was carved on using a finger, he exclaimed, “It was written using a finger?”

Qiu Chuji said, “It startles people when they hear this, indeed it was written using a finger!”

Guo Jing said, "There is such a thing as a god on earth?"

Qiu Chuji said, "The poem was written by two people. The two of them are both famous people in the world of Wulin. The person who wrote the first part of the poem is a very special person, eloquent in both kung fu and the arts; they had reached that stage with ease. It's not a god, but a once in a hundred years outstanding personality."

Guo Jing was full of admiration, and asked, "Who was this senior? Could elder introduce me to them so I could meet them."

Qiu Chuji said, "I have never seen that person. Sit down; I will explain the reasons for today's events."

Guo Jing sat down on the rock and looked on at the fire dying down at the foot of the peak, and said, "It is a pity that Rong'er is not with me, wouldn't it be great if we could hear this interesting story together."

Qiu Chuji said, "Do you understand the poem?" Guo Jing is now middle aged, but the tone that Qiu Chuji spoke in was the same as if he were talking to the young Guo Jing of ten years ago, it wasn't deliberate.

Guo Jing understood the meaning and said, "The first part of the poem is talking about Zhang Liang, I have heard his story from Rong'er so I understand a little. He met an old man underneath a bridge and picked up his shoe; the man treated him like his son and taught him the arts. Later he helped to regain the land of the Han and became one of the three heroes; he eventually retired and lived free from care. The latter part is about ancestor Chongyang, so I don't know much about that."

Qiu Chuji said, "Do you know what type of person Founder Chongyang was?"

Guo Jing thought for a while and said, "Founder Chongyang was your teacher, he was the one who built the Quanzhen sect, and at the first Mount Hua tournament he was the victor."

Qiu Chuji said, "You are correct, what about when he was younger?"

Guo Jing shook his head and replied, "I don't know."

Qiu Chuji said, "The hero's disposition had gone, clearly marking his separation. My teacher hadn't always been a Taoist. When he was young, he first learned the arts; then studied martial arts, and was a respected hero in Jianghu. But because of his hate for the Jin soldiers entering his homeland, ruining his homeland and killing his people, he carried the flag and fought the Jin. He set up a boundary, and managed to do great things in the central plains, but eventually the Jin army broke through, my teacher lost the battles. Many soldiers died. He eventually became a Taoist. He became "the living dead", and for a few years he lived in the tomb in our mountain. He didn't take a step out of the tomb; his meaning was that he was alive but dead. He didn't want to live under the same sky as the Jin scoundrels. What was called "bu gong dai tian" (will not live under the same sky as one's enemy) and that was his intention."

Guo Jing said, "I understand now."

Qiu Chuji said, "After a few years, an old friend of my teacher came and tried to persuade him to leave the tomb and do great things with him again. My teacher was still downhearted, and felt that he couldn't face his old Jianghu friends anymore; and so didn't leave the tomb. Eight years later, a lifelong rival of my teacher arrived outside the tomb and cursed and insulted him for seven days and for seven nights; my teacher couldn't stand it anymore and came out of the cave to confront him. Who would have thought that

the person would give a laugh and say, "You've come out now, there is no need to return!" My teacher was startled at his words, and realized that the enemy had good intentions. He felt it was a pity that someone of his ability would hide themselves in the tomb and tricked him into coming out. The two changed the relationship, from enemies into friends, and both re-entered the world of Jianghu."

When Guo Jing heard about this senior's actions, he was curious and asked, "Who are these persons? Are they in the same class as the four greats Eastern Heretic, Western Poison, Southern Emperor and Northern Beggar?"

Qiu Chuji said, "No. When it comes to martial arts, she is above the four greats, but because she is a woman, she didn't like to attract the attention of other people and so outsiders did not know much about her; even her name was unknown.

Guo Jing said, "Oh, so it was a girl."

Qiu Chuji sighed, "That senior was actually in love with my teacher, and wanted to marry to him. That year they kept on arguing and fighting, but it was because the girl wanted to get closer to my teacher. But she was a very proud woman and didn't want to be the one to show her feelings first. Eventually my teacher understood, but my teacher could not forget that he had to help his country to drive out the enemy, and said, "I have not completed my wishes, how could I settle down now?" My teacher rejected her love and didn't know what to do. That senior thought that my teacher didn't respect her feelings and the feud between them restarted. They had been enemies who turned friends but became enemies again because of love, and agreed to a date to duel on Mount Zhongnan."

Guo Jing said, "There was no need for it."

Qiu Chuji replied, "Yes! My teacher knew her feelings and had to let her win. Who would have thought the senior's character was strange, she said, "If you let me win, then that means you have even less respect for me?" My teacher could do nothing else but to duel with her. The two then fought each other, a few thousand moves passed, my teacher did not use any powerful moves, and eventually it was hard to pick a winner. The woman said, "You are not using all your ability to fight, who do you think I am?" My teacher said, "It is hard to pick out a winner from dueling, how about we test our literature skills?? The woman said, "Fine. If I lose, I won't ever see you again so you can be in peace." My teacher then said, "What do you want if you win?? The woman's face turned red, and she couldn't reply; she eventually clenched her teeth and said, "You've got to give up your Living Dead Tomb for me to live in." The woman had a hidden meaning behind her demand, if she won, she would live with my teacher and be together. My teacher felt awkward, he knew his martial arts skills were slightly higher than hers; he would be forced to beat her otherwise he wouldn't have any more quiet days. So he asked her, "How are we going to compete."

She said, "Today we are both tired, we'll meet again tomorrow night." When it was approaching dusk, the two met again. She said, "Before we compete, we need to set a rule." My teacher said, "What rule do you want to set?" The woman said, "If you win, I'll immediately kill myself; I won't see you ever again. If I win you have to give the Tomb of the Living Dead to me, obey me forever and mustn't question anything. If you don't, you have to become a man of religion; I don't care if you become a monk or a Taoist. Whether you become a Taoist or a monk, you will need to build a temple and accompany me for ten years."

My teacher understood, "obey her forever" means that she wants me to marry her. If I don't and become a monk or a Taoist, I won't be able to marry another. But how can I win

and watch you kill yourself? It is also hard for me to accompany you for ten years here.” My teacher hesitated on his decision. The senior excelled in terms of looks and martial arts; my teacher was touched by her love, but when it came to getting married, they just weren’t destined to. My teacher thought for a while, and eventually made his decision, and knew she would do what she had said. If she lost she would definitely kill herself, and decided no matter what they competed at he would let her win. He said, “Fine, as you said.”

The woman said, “If we just competed in literature it would be too easy. We’ll write some words on that stone using our fingers, whoever writes the best will be the winner.”

My teacher shook his head and said, “I’m not a god, how can I use my finger to write on that stone?”

The woman said, “If I can then, you’ll admit defeat?”

My teacher was forced to agree with no other option. He knew that no one on earth could do this and so exploited it and thought of a way that there will be no winner or loser, and the competition would end. He said, “If you’ve got the ability then I’ll admit defeat. If you can’t do it, there is no difference between us and we will not compete anymore.”

The woman gave a laugh and said, “Fine, get ready to be a Taoist.” As she said this, her left hand stroked the rock for a while, and after a while she said, “What should I write? Ah, the first hero who became a man of religion was Zhang Zhifang. He gave up his name and wealth, he’s your ancestor.” She then stretched out her right hand and extended her index finger, and wrote on the stone. My teacher saw her finger touch the rock, and dust flowed from the rock, she had carved a word, he had never been so startled in his life. She wrote the first part of the poem.

My teacher had lost and had nothing to say, he immediately moved out of the tomb and let her move in, and near the tomb he built a small Taoist temple; it was the predecessor of the Chongyang Palace.”

Guo Jing also couldn't believe it, he extended his finger and traced the writing on the rock, the carvings were indeed written with a finger and said, “That senior's finger kung fu would indeed frighten people when they hear about it.”

Qiu Chuji raised his head and laughed out to the sky, “Jing'er, this event could fool my teacher, me and now even you. But if your wife was here, she would not be fooled.”

Guo Jing opened his eyes wide and said, “Is there some kind of trick involved?”

Qiu Chuji said, “Could it be? Who on earth has the best finger kung fu?”

Guo Jing said, “Of course it's Reverend Yideng and his “Solitary Yang Finger”.”

Qiu Chuji replied, “Yes! But even with Reverend Yideng's finger kung fu, it would be hard for him to accomplish this feat on a piece of wood, how would he be able to do it on a piece of rock? And could someone else achieve this? My teacher became a Taoist and still could not figure out what happened. Later, your father in law Island Master Huang came and visited my teacher. He knew that he was a very intelligent man and so told him the events, and asked him to help. Island master Huang thought for a while and then gave a chuckle, “I understand. I have yet to complete this type of kung fu; I'll come back in one month's time.” He laughed as he left the mountain.

After a month, Island Master Huang came back and went with my teacher to look at the rock again. When that senior wrote

her poem, she ended it with “Raising people and raising books, the price is heavy?” Her meaning was that she wanted my teacher to have the same fate as Zhang Liang, leave the world and enter religion. Island Master Huang stroked the rock slab with his left hand for a while, his right hand stretched out and extended his finger and wrote a few words, he wrote everything from “Chongyang raised Quanzhen” to “Forever on Mount Zhongnan, a mist will linger”; he wrote to praise my teacher.

My teacher saw that the words were deep, and were exactly the same as what happened last time, and was even more startled and thought, “Huang Yaoshi’s kung fu is definitely below me, how on earth did he managed to obtain such a powerful finger skill?” He was suspicious and extended his finger on to the rock and he managed to make a hole in it.

He then led Guo Jing’s hand to where his teacher had made the hole. Guo Jing felt the mark, and put his finger in it, true enough, it was as if someone had made it with their finger. He thought, “Could it be that the rock is especially soft, and not like any other rock?” He generated chi in his finger and pressed into the rock, but he felt his fingertip start to ache, the rock did not move.

Qiu Chuji laughed, “Even the foolish little boy can’t figure it out. Before the woman wrote on the stone slab, her left hand had stroked the rock for a while. She was actually holding a piece of small rock, and made the rock surface soft, within the time it takes to burn an incense stick, the stone slab would remain soft. Island Master Huang saw through the trick, and went away to find a suitable stone to do this and then came back to demonstrate this.”

Guo Jing didn’t say anything and thought, “My father in law’s intelligence is not below that of that senior, but where is he now?” He missed him a lot.

Qiu Chuji didn't know what he was thinking and carried on, "When my teacher first became a Taoist, he was still vehement, but as he read more Taoist books, he knew it was meant to be, he became enlightened and decided to spread our sect's name. When you think about it, if it weren't for that senior's plan, the Quanzhen sect would not exist; I would not be here today, and we wouldn't know where you, Guo Jing, would be."

Guo Jing nodded, and asked, "So what is that senior's name, and is she still alive?"

Qiu Chuji sighed and replied, "When that senior was in the world of Wulin, she was always discreet, very few people actually saw her. Apart from my teacher, I don't think anyone else knows her name, and my teacher never actually mentioned her name. That senior had passed away before the time of the first Mount Hua tournament, otherwise with her martial arts and character, how can it be that she did not appear?"

Guo Jing nodded his head and said, "It must be. Does she have any descendants?"

Qiu Chuji sighed and said, "All of today's trouble comes from this point. That senior didn't take in a disciple during her life; she only had a maid with her. That maid did not enter the world of Jianghu, so no one knew about her, but she took in two disciples. The eldest disciple is called Li, you must know about this, in Jianghu they call her the "Scarlet Serpent Deity" Li Mochou."

Guo Jing gave an "ah" sound and said, "That Li Mochou is vindictive and ruthless, so those are her origins."

Qiu Chuji said, "You've seen her?"

Guo Jing replied, "A few months ago, I came across her in Jiang Nan. Her kung fu is at a very high level."

Qiu Chuji said, "You hurt her?"

Guo Jing shook his head, "No, we didn't actually meet each other, I only saw how she killed countless women, her ruthlessness has no comparisons, like Mei Chaofeng was when she was alive."

Qiu Chuji said, "It was fortunate you didn't hurt her, otherwise there'd be trouble. Her apprentice sister is named "Long"."

Guo Jing shivered and said, "She is the girl called Long?"

Qiu Chuji's face changed colour slightly, and said, "What? You've seen her? How did this happen?"

Guo Jing said, "Disciple has not seen her before. When I was coming up the mountain, the Taoist brothers insulted me and called me a perverted scoundrel, and said I came for the one called Long, this made me confused."

Qiu Chuji laughed out loud, and sighed at the same time, "Chongyang Palace took the matter into its own hands. If we hadn't made this error, and created the misunderstanding, not only would the large "Big Dipper Formation" have repelled the attackers, you would have arrived here earlier, and apprentice brother Hao would not have been hurt."

He saw that Guo Jing's face was fascinated and continued, "Today is the one named Long's eighteenth birthday."

Guo Jing opened his mouth and said, "Ah, it's her eighteenth birthday!" However he did not understand how a girl's eighteenth birthday could cause so much trouble.

Qiu Chuji said, "Outsiders do not know her first name so all of those troublemakers call her Xiao Longnu, we'll call her that as well. One night eighteen years ago, there was the cry of a little baby girl outside Chongyang Palace, a palace disciple came out to take a look, and saw the little baby girl wrapped in a bundle on the ground. It was inconvenient for the palace to take in a baby girl, but Taoists are supposed to be merciful so we couldn't leave her there. At the time my apprentice brother who was the master of the sect, and I were not on the mountain, and before any of the disciples of the palace could do anything, a middle aged woman suddenly came out from behind the mountain and said, "The little baby is unfortunate and pitiful, I'll take her in!" The disciples couldn't have asked for more, and so gave the baby girl to her. Later, apprentice brother Ma and I returned to the palace, when they told us about this event, from the description of the woman, we knew she was the maid from the Tomb of the Living Dead. She had met the seven of us a few times before, but we had never spoken. Although we are neighbors and because of our seniors' relationship, it is difficult for us to talk to her about it. When I heard that the matter was resolved, I didn't keep it in my mind. Later, her disciple the "Scarlet Serpent Deity" Li Mochou, left the mountain. She was ruthless and vindictive, her martial arts were very high, and caused trouble around the world of Jianghu. Our Quanzhen sect requested to talk to the maid about this many times, to get her to do something about it. Eventually, we didn't act out of respect for her. We wrote a letter and sent it to the tomb. It was extremely respectful and polite. After we sent the letter, it was like a stone sinking into the sea, she still did not reply, and she tolerated Li Mochou's actions, and didn't govern her.

One day, after a few years, outside the tomb we saw a white banner hung on a pine thorn thicket and we knew that the woman had passed away, so the six of us went to the tomb to pay our respects. As we were going through the ceremony, a

thirteen or fourteen year old girl emerged from the pine thorn thickets, greeted us and thanked us for the ceremony, and said, "Master has left the world, and has ordered me to tell all you elders that if that person still causes trouble, my master has a plan to punish her, please don't worry." When she finished, she turned around and went back inside. We wanted to ask her some questions about this but she had already gone back into the tomb. Our master had made a rule; everyone under the order of the Quanzhen sect must not take one step into the tomb. When she left, we pondered and wondered, our Taoist friend is dead, so how could she punish her student? We felt sorry for the little girl and so we sent her food and supplies, but each time she did not touch them, and ordered a servant to return them. She was strange. She was just like her teacher, and her ancestor. But she had a servant to look after her, so we didn't worry about her. Eventually we all had business to attend to, and were rarely present in the palace. We didn't hear anything from the girl. For some reason, news of Li Mochou disappeared and she didn't cause any more trouble. We knew that our Taoist friend had come up with an ingenious plan, and we all were in awe.

Spring came, me and apprentice brother Wang had to go away to Shanxi for some business. We were at a hero's home in Guangzhou when we heard startling news. We heard that one year later, all types of crooks, scoundrels and evildoers would descend on Mount Zhongnan and cause havoc. Mount Zhongnan is the root of our sect and the reason they've come to Mount Zhongnan is to fight our sect, how could we not take precautions? Apprentice brother Wang and I were afraid that the news was unreliable, so we sent out people to investigate; true enough, the news was real. But it wasn't because they wanted to duel with our sect, but it was to do with Xiao Longnu of the Tomb of the Living Dead.

Guo Jing asked, "She is just a young girl, and has never left the tomb, how did she make enemies with all those people?"

Qiu Chuji replied, "The reasons for all this wasn't related to us and originally we didn't care. One day when the evildoers started to descend on Mount Zhongnan, we decided we couldn't just stand by, so we listened for more news, and discovered that Xiao Longnu's apprentice sister Li Mochou started all this business."

Guo Jing said, "Li Mochou?"

Qiu Chuji said, "Yes. Her master had taught her martial arts for a few years and had discovered her character was ill, and so said she had completed her training, and ordered her to leave the mountain. When Li Mochou's master was still alive, although she did evil deeds, she was still slightly worried. But when her teacher died, she used the excuse of paying her respects to enter the Tomb of the Living Dead, and tried to expel her apprentice sister. She knew that she had not learned everything from her master or her sect's founder, and wanted to come to see if there were any kung fu manuals or manuscripts hidden in the tomb. She knew that there were many booby traps in the tomb, and remembered them. She entered through two sets of doors of the tomb, and by the third one she saw a letter left by her teacher. Her teacher had predicted that she would come back, and left this letter for her and part of the letter said: "On a certain year, month, date, it will be your apprentice sister's eighteenth birthday. If you do not stop your evil ways and repent, then your apprentice sister will assume leadership and seek you out and rid the sect of so treacherous a disciple."

Li Mochou was furious, and burst through the third set of doors, and fell into the poisonous trap left by her teacher; if it wasn't for Xiao Longnu curing her poison, she would have died. She knew that it was lethal and so left the tomb. But she had failed, would she let it go? Eventually she came back a few times but each time she suffered. In her last attempt, she actually fought with her apprentice sister. Xiao Longnu

was only fifteen or sixteen years of age at that time, but her skills exceeded that of her apprentice sister. If she hadn't let her off, it would not have been a hard task to take her life."

Guo Jing interrupted, "I'm afraid that could be just a rumour of the Jianghu world."

Qiu Chuji asked, "Why?"

Guo Jing replied, "My master hero Ke has fought with Li Mochou twice, and said that her skills had their fine points. Even Reverend Yideng's high disciple Wu Santong lost to her. Xiao Longnu has not even reached twenty yet, even if her skills were higher, it would be hard for her to beat Li Mochou."

Qiu Chuji said, "That piece of news was heard by apprentice brother Wang from a friend of his from the Beggar Clan. Whether Xiao Longnu did or did not defeat her apprentice sister, there wasn't a witness so no one knows apart from them. I only know that this was what people of Jianghu said. Li Mochou was upset and jealous that her teacher was biased, and passed on the higher set of skills to her apprentice sister. So she created a rumour, and said that on a certain year, month and date, the one called Xiao Longnu who lives in the tomb will have a martial arts competition to decide her marriage." Guo Jing heard about this, he immediately thought about when Yang Kang and Mu Nianci met in Yanjing, and let out a quiet sigh.

Qiu Chuji knew what he was thinking and he too gave a sigh, and said, "She revealed: whoever beats Xiao Longnu, not only will they get to marry her, all the riches and kung fu manuals of the sect will be theirs. The evildoers did not know who Xiao Longnu was, but Li Mochou widely spread the fact that her apprentice sister's beauty exceeded hers. The "Scarlet Serpent Deity" is said to be a very beautiful woman,

her beauty is very rare within the world of Wulin, and even women from brothels can't compare with her."

Guo Jing thought, "What is so special about that? My Rong'er exceeds her beauty over one hundred times."

Qiu Chuji continued, "Many evildoers of the Wulin world lusted after Li Mochou. But those who give a prolonged glance, or did not treat her with respect she would immediately punish them. Now they hear she has an apprentice sister whose beauty exceeded hers, and who had publicly announced that she will have a competition to decide her marriage, so they all thought why not and try their luck?"

Guo Jing was startled and said, "So all those people that were here were in search of marriage. Its no wonder the students of the palace called me a perverted scoundrel."

Qiu Chuji said, "I also heard that these people did not even care about the Quanzhen sect. When a large crowd of people descended on Mount Zhongnan, we wanted to intervene and become a needle in their eyes. Apprentice brother Wang and I had received the news, and decided to repel the evildoers. We had gathered all the students of our sect ten days earlier. Apprentice brother Liu and apprentice sister Sun were in Shanxi and couldn't return. We arranged to practice the "Big Dipper Formations" and we also sent a letter to the tomb to invite Xiao Longnu to the palace. The letter was sent, but there was no reply, Xiao Longnu had ignored us."

Guo Jing said, "So she left the tomb."

Qiu Chuji said, "No. From the top of the mountain and looking downwards, you could see smoke coming out from the tomb everyday. Take a look, it's over there." He pointed to the west. Guo Jing followed his finger and looked to the west, but all he could see for ten miles was forest, he did not know

where the Tomb of the Living Dead was. He thought about the young eighteen-year-old girl, living in the tomb all the time; if it was Rong'er, she would be bored to death.

Qiu Chuji said, "All our apprentice brothers were set to meet the enemy. Five days ago, the scouts who were sent out came back and discovered who the two most powerful people were from the crowd of evildoers. They had agreed to first meet at the foot of the mountain at the Everywhere Light Temple, and used the smashing of the stone slab as the signal. You inadvertently smashed the stone slab, and frightened people with your strength; it was no wonder my grand disciples made such a commotion.

The two tyrants' names are quite famous; they have entered the central plains this year to shake the world of Wulin. You have resided on Peach Blossom Island so you wouldn't know about the affairs of the outside world. That nobleman is a Mongolian prince, it was said that he is Genghis Khan's close nephew. Other people call him Prince Huo Dou. You've lived on the plains of Mongolia for a long time, and you were familiar with the royalty, can you remember meeting anyone like him?"

Guo Jing quietly repeated "Prince Huo Dou", he recalled his face, but couldn't remember whose son he could be, but he felt that his face was handsome, proud but also carried a devious air. Genghis Khan had four sons, the eldest Shu Chi [Jochi] was violent and brave, the second son Cha He Tai [Chagatai] was a clever planner, the third prince Wo Kuo Tai [Ogedai] is the khan of the Mongols at this moment in time, he was easy going, the fourth prince Tuo Lei [Tolui] was the most humane, when he thought about it, Huo Dou did not resemble any of the four princes.

Qiu Chuji said, "I'm afraid that a man of his stature coming to create havoc here has an ulterior motive. His kung fu

originates from Western Tibet; he arrived in the central plains at the beginning of the year. He wounded the three heroes of Henan, and later on he single-handedly killed the seven Lords of Lanzhou. His name was spread widely throughout the land, we didn't predict that he would have the nerve to come to our sect and cause trouble. The other Tibetan monk is called Da'erba; he has supernatural strength, and his kung fu is from the same school as Huo Dou. It appears that he is the senior apprentice brother. He is a monk, of course he hasn't come here to get married; he's here to aid Huo Dou.

When the rest of the evil men heard the two were coming, they remembered the matter of dueling for marriage. Years ago, in front of a crowd of people, Li Mochou had said the tomb contained mountains of treasures, and had countless kung fu manuscripts and manuals; saying there was the formulae to the "Eighteen Subduing Dragon Palms", the "Solitary Yang Finger" and numerous others. Although the crooks and scoundrels were unsure, they thought that if they went up to the mountain and opened up the tomb, they would be able to get a share of the spoils. About one hundred or so of them came up the mountain. Originally our "Big Dipper Formation" could have easily repelled them away from the foot of our mountain, not allowing them to come through and teach them not to take one step into Chongyang Palace. We were resisting them when the misunderstanding occurred; there is no need to say anymore."

Guo Jing felt very guilty and apologetic, and wanted to say a few words of apology. Qiu Chuji waved his hand and laughed, "Letting a laugh out rids your worries and the moon is still in the sky above the western lake. The halls and buildings are just objects; human possessions mean nothing, so why worry about them? You have honed your martial arts for the last ten years, could it be that you do not understand the meaning of this?"

Guo Jing laughed and said, "Yes!"

Qiu Chuji laughed and said, "Actually when I saw the back courtyard being burned down to the ground, I was very angry and furious, but after a while I calmed down. Compared to how calm apprentice brother Ma was, I am nowhere as enlightened as he is."

Guo Jing said, "You can't blame yourself for getting angry at all those crooks and scoundrels."

Qiu Chuji said, "As you fought with the main "Big Dipper Formation", the two tyrants led a pack of scoundrels and took advantage of the situation and led them to Chongyang Palace. As soon as they arrived, they set fire to the buildings; apprentice brother Hao led a formation out against Prince Huo Dou. He was wary of Huo Duo's skills as they were very strange. Apprentice brother Hao was careless and rash when he was fighting him, and ended up being struck in the chest. We set up a formation to protect him. Without apprentice brother Hao in the formation we had to replace him with students whose skills were much inferior, thus the power of the formation was reduced and limited. If you hadn't arrived just in time, today would be the day where the Quanzhen sect would have been destroyed. When I think about it, even if the other students didn't mistake you for the enemy, though they would be able to stop all the scoundrels and crooks from entering the mountain, they would not be able to stop Da'erba and Huo Dou. If the two combined together and attacked our formation, we would not have lost, but we definitely would not have defeated them as quickly and as spectacularly as you did."

As he said this, they heard a sound from the west; someone was blowing a horn. The horn sound was pleasant and relaxing, as Guo Jing listened, he imagined himself back in

the Mongolian plains, looking out at the yellow sands of Mongolia, giving off a beautiful glow.

After a while, he heard “an intent to kill” was beginning to emerge from the sounds of the horn, as if it was trying to invite someone for a duel. Qiu Chuji’s face turned angry and shouted, “Beasts, beasts!”

He looked at the forest to the west and said, “Jing’er, you and that scoundrel have set a ten year date; you are going to meet again in these ten years, I advise to you not to intervene. Is there such a sincere and honorable thing under heaven? Let’s go!”

Guo Jing said, “It is Prince Huo Dou?”

Qiu Chuji replied, “It is him. He is trying to get Xiao Longnu to duel with him.” While saying this, he was already flying down the mountain. Guo Jing followed.

The two traveled for about a mile, when they heard the horn sound was getting closer, but within the sound of the horn, they could make out the sound of a weapon was being used; it was Da’erba.

Qiu Chuji was angry and said, “How can two martial artists gang up and bully a young girl; they really don’t care about face.” He increased his efforts and sped up. In a flash, the two were at the foot of the hill, passing a stone slab. All Guo Jing could see in front of him was a black forest. Outside the forest stood one hundred short and tall scoundrels and crooks, it was the same people who had just attacked Chongyang Palace. The two of them hid behind the stone slab, surveying their actions. They saw Prince Huo Dou and Da’erba get up. Prince Huo Dou raised his horn and blew. Da’erba raised a large golden pestle (rod shaped object used for crushing) with his left hand. He tapped the golden bracelet on his right wrist with the pestle, and created a

noise, the two noises combined, trying to draw out Xiao Longnu. The two did this for a while, but no sounds came from the forest.

Huo Dou put down his horn, and clearly said, "I am Mongolia's Prince Huo Dou; I have come to congratulate Xiao Longnu on your birthday."

As he finished, three chords from a zither was heard, it was Xiao Longnu replying. Hu Dou was happy and said, "It is known far and wide that Miss Long will have a duel to find a husband. I have dared to come forward, and meet this challenge, I ask Miss Long to make her move. A resounding sound was suddenly heard from the zither, clearly showing signs of anger. The rest of the crowd didn't move, they could hear from the zither notes the intent of the player, wanting them to leave. Huo Dou chuckled and said, "I am from an affluent family, handsome, sincere and willing, I wouldn't dare to offend you. Miss Long is a heroine in the world, please don't be shy."

When he finished, the sound of the zither soared, a note of reproving could be heard from within the sound. Huo Dou glanced at Da'erba, the monk nodded. Huo Dou said, "If Miss does not show herself, then I will have to enter." He then picked up his horn, waved his right hand and leapt into the forest. The crowd of people also went forward, and all thought, "Even the famous Quanzhen sect could not stop us, Xiao Longnu is alone and is just a young girl, aren't we overdoing things?" But they were all thinking about getting to the treasure first and ignored this, pushing and shoving they entered the forest.

Qiu Chuji shouted out, "This place is Quanzhen sect's Founder Chongyang's old residence, leave quickly."

When the crowd heard this, they were all startled, but their feet didn't stop moving forwards.

Qiu Chuji was angry and said, "Jing'er, let's use force!" The two emerged from behind the stone slab and were about to enter the forest; then they suddenly heard cries from the crowd of people, and they were dashing back out of the forest.

Qiu Chuji and Guo Jing stopped, they saw tens of people flying out of the forest, even Huo Dou and Da'erba came flying out, they were rushing out much quicker than they did when they were forced away from Chongyang Palace. Qiu Chuji and Guo Jing wondered, "What method did Xiao Longnu used to drive these people away?" As they wondered, they suddenly heard the sounds of something approaching quickly, under the moonlight they saw a collection of white and grey blurs emerging from the forest, and were diving onto the crowds of evildoers.

Guo Jing asked, "What is that?" Qiu Chuji shook his head and did not reply, and looked closer, some of the people who were running slower were being dived on by the things and they immediately dropped down onto the ground, holding their heads and screaming.

Guo Jing was startled and said, "It's a swarm of bees, why are they white?" As he said this, a swarm of jade colored bees stung five or six people. In front of the forest were ten people who were rolling about on the ground, crying and screaming. It would have sent shivers down the backs to those who could hear them. Guo Jing thought, "It does hurt if you get stung by a bee, but there is no need to cry out like that; could it be that the Jade Bee's poison is very potent?" He saw a grey image flying towards him, the Jade Bees were like smoke, and were flying onto Guo Jing and Qiu Chuji. The bees were ferocious and it was hard to repel them, Guo Jing wanted to turn around and escape, Qiu Chuji circulated chi through his "dan tian", and blew out through his mouth at the bees that were coming towards him. The swarm of bees

was flying forwards fiercely, but when they met the fierce gust of wind they were pushed back. As Qiu Chuji's first breath finished he sent out a second one. Guo Jing had learned this type of skill, and then did the same; he and Qiu Chuji created a gust of wind. The skills they used were advanced orthodox skills, the swarm of bees could not resist and flew past the two and chased after Huo Dou and Da'erba. The people who were rolling along on the ground were crying out for mercy, calling out for their fathers and mothers, and sobbing uncontrollably. Someone said, "I'm sorry, I beg goddess Xiao Longnu to save my life!"

Guo Jing was startled; "He is a member of the Jianghu world, even if his arm or leg was chopped off, he may not call out in pain. How can just a little sting by a bee be so lethal?" Suddenly the sound of the zither was heard from the forest, accompanying it was a white mist. Guo Jing and Qiu Chuji could smell the scent of an extremely sweet and fragrant flower. After a while, the sounds of the bees came closer, the bees sensed the aroma and returned to the forest, it was Xiao Longnu who had created the scent to order the bees back.

Qiu Chuji and Xiao Longnu had been neighbors for eighteen years but he didn't know that she had such skills; he was in awe but also felt amused, and said, "If we knew our fragrant neighbor was so prepared, the Quanzhen sect should not have been so nosy." Although he was talking to Guo Jing, he had said it with his chi and wanted Xiao Longnu to hear it. The music from the forest changed, gentle and peaceful, the sense of appreciation was hidden within the music. Qiu Chuji laughed out loud, and said clearly, "Miss, there is no need for all this. This Old Taoist and disciple Guo Jing wish you well on your birthday." Two notes were heard from the zither and then nothing more.

Guo Jing sensed that within the notes there was a feeling of sorrow and pity. He said to Qiu Chuji, "Elder, why did she let

them go?”

Qiu Chuji replied, “Miss Long makes her own decisions, let’s go.” The two turned around and headed east, on the way, Guo Jing once again requested Qiu Chuji to accept Yang Guo into Quanzhen.

Qiu Chuji sighed, “Your godfather Yang Tiexin was a great hero, why did he have no descendants? I played a part in the downfall of Yang Kang. Don’t worry, I will do my best and teach the boy how to be a good person.”

Guo Jing was pleased, and got down on his knees to say thanks. The two chatted away as they reached Chongyang Palace; the sky had now begun to get bright. Many Taoists were clearing up the back courtyard and tending to the damage.

Qiu Chuji summoned a group of Taoists to meet Guo Jing, and pointed out to the bearded Taoist who had led the “Big Dipper Formation” against him and said, “That is apprentice brother Wang’s first disciple, his name is Zhao Zhijing. Out of all the third generation disciples, his kung fu is the highest, we’ll let him teach Guo’er kung fu.”

Guo Jing had exchanged hands with that person, and knew his kung fu was high, and he was pleased, and ordered Yang Guo to undergo the custom of greeting a new master to Zhao Zhijing, and he himself apologized to Zhao Zhijing. Guo Jing remained on Mount Zhongnan for a few days, and repeatedly gave advice to Yang Guo, then, after saying goodbyes to him and the Taoists, he returned to Peach Blossom Island.

Qiu Chuji remembered years ago when he taught Yang Kang kung fu, and let him do as he pleased in the palace. Eventually this led Yang Kang to make wrong choices and thought, “Being strict will create a good student, and being harsh will bring a filial son. I must be strict and keep a close

eye on Guo'er; otherwise he will follow the same road as his father." He then summoned Yang Guo, and then gave him a stern talking to, and told him he will have hardships ahead, he must listen to every word that his master says, and must not be lazy.

Yang Guo did not even want to be on Mount Zhongnan, and for no reason he was given a strict scolding, he was angry, he held in his tears and didn't reply, when Qiu Chuji left he let out a cry and sobbed.

Suddenly a voice from behind coldly said, "What's the matter? Has Martial Grand Master wronged you?"

Yang Guo was startled; he stopped crying and turned around only to see his master Zhao Zhijing, he quickly dropped his hands and said, "No."

Zhao Zhijing said, "Why did you cry?"

Yang Guo said, "I was thinking about Uncle Guo and became sad."

He had just heard Qiu Chuji giving a stern scolding to him, now Yang Guo is saying it is because he misses Guo Jing, he wasn't convinced and thought, "He is so crafty already at such a young age; if I don't punish him now, how could he change?" He then shouted, "You dare to lie to your master?"

Yang Guo had seen how Guo Jing had beaten the Taoists so spectacularly and convincingly, and had seen Qiu Chuji and the others being forced back onto their hands and feet by Huo Dou and the evildoers. They depended on Guo Jing to save them, so he had already made up his mind on the Quanzhen kung fu being nothing but ordinary. He didn't respect Qiu Chuji, what about Zhao Zhijing? Guo Jing had neglected to explain to him that the Quanzhen sect's kung fu was orthodox and profound, years ago Wang Chongyang's

kung fu was the best in the world, other family's' and other sects' best fighters could not compare. The reasons for what he saw was not because of the Quanzhen sect's kung fu was useless, but because the group of Taoists who he had seen fighting had not practiced enough. Yang Guo then believed that it must be because that the Guo couple did not want him as a disciple, and just gave him to anyone to learn martial arts. He had seen with his own two eyes that the Taoists' swords had been forced out of their hands, even if Guo Jing had explained, Yang Guo would not have believed it. He saw that his master's expression wasn't pleasant, and thought, "I only became your disciple because I had no choice; even if I learned everything you know, what use would it be? Why are you acting like you are in charge?" He didn't reply.

Zhao Zhijing was angry; his voice became even louder and said, "I asked you a question, you dare to not reply?"

Yang Guo said, "Whatever master wants me to say, I'll say it."

Zhao Zhijing heard that he was disrespectful, he could not hold his temper anymore, he hit him across the face and left a deep red mark. Yang Guo cried out, and began to cry and ran away. Zhao Zhijing quickly followed and caught him, and asked, "Where are you going?"

Yang Guo said, "Let go of me, I don't want to learn from you."

Zhao Zhijing was irate and shouted, "Bastard, what did you say?"

Yang Guo immediately became bold, and shouted, "Rotten Taoist, you dog, you can kill me!"

A disciple master relationship was looked upon as very significant, in the world of Wulin; a disciple master relationship was the same as a father son relationship. If the

master wanted to kill the student, the disciple would not dare to resist. Yang Guo had dared to insult his teacher, it was a rarely seen and rarely heard event; it was treason and heresy. Zhao Zhijing's face turned yellow, he raised his hand and wanted to give him another slap. Yang Guo suddenly jumped up, and grabbed his arm, and bit on his right index finger. After Yang Guo had received Ou Yangfeng's method of practicing internal energy, he practiced it occasionally; he now had a decent foundation. Zhao Zhijing was angry, and didn't have his guard up against a small child. Being grabbed and fiercely bitten, he couldn't move and his finger was in pain; he couldn't endure it. Zhao Zhijing raised his left fist and heavily hit Yang Guo on the shoulder, and shouted, "Do you want to die? Let go!?" Yang Guo was furious, even if he were threatened by swords and spears he would not let go, but he felt pain in his shoulder. His teeth bit even harder, a "ka" sound was heard, he had bitten through the bone. He shouted, "Ah!" and fiercely threw a left fist at Yang Guo's head, and made him faint. He opened his jaw and took out his right index finger. He saw his hand was full of fresh blood, though he managed to fix his finger back into place, his finger would not have the strength that it used to have. This will affect his kung fu, he became furious and kicked Yang Guo a few times.

He ripped some cloth of Yang Guo's sleeve, and wrapped it around his wound. He took a look around, it was lucky that no one was about. He thought that if someone saw this, it would be spread throughout the Jianghu world that Quanzhen's Zhao Zhijing's finger was bitten off by his little disciple; he would lose all his respect. He then went and filled a basin with cold water and splashed it over Yang Guo to wake him up. When Yang Guo woke, he was like a madman and wanted to fight again. Zhao Zhijing grabbed his chest and shouted, "Animal, you really don't want to live do you?"

Yang Guo shouted, "Scoundrel, rotten Taoist, calling me an animal, after being beaten to the ground by my Uncle Guo and eating faeces off the floor, begging for mercy won't help your descendants; you're the animal!"

Zhao Zhijing extended his right palm and hit him again. He kept his guard up, if Yang Guo wanted to attack him, how could he get near? In the wink of an eye he kicked him a few times. If Zhao Zhijing wanted to hurt him, it would be too easy, but he remembered that Yang Guo was his disciple. If he hurt him badly, how would he answer if my master or martial uncles asked about it? Yang Guo ferociously attacked, as if Zhao Zhijing was his most hated person in the world; although he was punched and kicked, and couldn't bear the pain, he did not intend to back down.

Zhao Zhijing punched and kicked him, though in his heart there was some feelings of regret. He saw that although he was bruised all over, he became bolder as he fought. In the end he had no other choice but to stretch out his left finger and touched the side of his body, sealing his pressure point. Yang Guo lay down on the ground and wasn't able to move, but his eyes were full of hate and fury.

Zhao Zhijing said, "You ingrate, do you submit now?" Yang Guo stared at him, with no intent to submit. Zhao Zhijing sat on a rock and recovered his breath. It was as if he had just dueled with a highly skilled opponent, fighting until he was out of breath. At the moment it wasn't because his arms and legs were tired, it was because he was troubled.

One disciple, one master; both looked at each other angrily, Zhao Zhijing tried to think of a good punishment for the rebel child, in the middle of his thoughts, he suddenly heard the bell ringing; it was the leader calling to gather the students. Zhao Zhijing was startled; he turned to Yang Guo and said, "If you don't cause anymore trouble, then I'll let

you go.” He extended his finger and unsealed his pressure point. Yang Guo immediately jumped up and leaped at him. Zhao Zhijing stepped aside two steps, and said, “I won’t hit you, how about that?”

Yang Guo said, “You won’t ever hit me again?”

Zhao Zhijing heard the bell ringing was becoming urgent, and didn’t dare to procrastinate and said, “If you are obedient, why should I hit you?”

Yang Guo said, “Fine, if you won’t hit me, I’ll call you master. If you hit me again, I won’t ever acknowledge you are my master.”

Zhao Zhijing was angry, but he put on a smile and nodded his head, and said, “The leader is summoning everyone, quickly follow me.” He saw that Yang Guo’s sleeve was ripped, his face swollen, he was afraid that someone will ask what happened so he cleaned him up, took his hand, and quickly went to the assembly at the front of the palace.

Zhao Zhijing and Yang Guo arrived, and both went into their respective groups. Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji and Wang Chuyi were sitting in front of them. Ma Yu clapped his hand three times, and the clearly said, “Elder Chang and the Sage of Tranquility have sent news from Shanxi, and said the business they are attending to has become really troublesome. My two apprentice brothers and I have decided that elder Eternal Spring (Qiu Chuji) and elder Shining Jade (Wang Chuyi) will take along ten disciples and immediately set off to rendezvous with them.” The rest of the Taoists all looked at each other, some were startled, and others were excited. Qiu Chuji then called out the names of ten disciples, and then said, “Everyone get prepared, you will leave with elder Shining Jade and I first thing tomorrow. The rest of you are dismissed.” The Taoists were dismissed; they quietly discussed the news amongst themselves. “That Li Mochou is

just a woman, how powerful can she be? Even elder Eternal Life Martial Uncle Liu can't handle her." Another said, "Isn't the Sage of Tranquility Martial Uncle Sun a woman? There are capable women, don't be surprised." Another Taoist said, "Now that Elder Qiu and Elder Wang are going, that Li Mochou won't be able to do anything."

Qiu Chuji went over to Zhao Zhijing and said to him, "Originally I wanted to take you along, but I'm worried that Guo'er's progress in martial arts will suffer, so you will stay here." He then saw the wounds on Yang Guo's face, and was startled, and said, "What's this? Who have you been fighting with?"

Zhao Zhijing was afraid, he knew that if Martial Uncle Qiu found out what happened, he would be severely scolded; he looked at Yang Guo and signaled to him with his eyes. Yang Guo had already decided what to do, when he saw the worried expression on Zhao Zhijing, he didn't let him know what he was doing and didn't respond to his pleas.

Qiu Chuji sternly said, "Who hit you like this? Who did this? Quickly tell me."

Zhao Zhijing heard Martial Uncle Qiu's voice was becoming sterner, and became even more scared.

Yang Guo said, "I wasn't in a fight, disciple tripped and fell down a ditch."

Qiu Chuji didn't believe him, and said, "You are lying; how could you trip for no reason? The wounds on your face aren't from falling over."

Yang Guo said, "Earlier, Grand Master told me to learn martial arts diligently."

Qiu Chuji said, "Yes, what about it?"

Yang Guo said, "After Grand Master left, the disciple thought that what you said was right, the disciple must work harder than ever before, and must not disappoint the hopes that Grand Master has for me." His pleasant words pleased and calmed down Qiu Chuji and he gave out a grunt. Yang Guo continued, "A mad dog came suddenly out of nowhere, and for no reason leapt at me trying to bite, the disciple tried to kick him away but he became more and more fierce. The disciple tried to turn around and run, but I was careless and fell down in a ditch. It was lucky that my teacher arrived, and rescued me."

Qiu Chuji listened, and then looked at Zhao Zhijing, signaling to him, asking if it was the truth. Zhao Zhijing was startled and thought, "How dare he, how dare the little bastard call me a mad dog." But in this situation he had no choice but to help him lie, he nodded his head and said, "It was I who saved him."

Qiu Chuji believed him, and said, "After I've left, teach him our sect's kung fu well, every ten days, your Martial Uncle, our leader will test him." Zhao Zhijing did not want to do this at all, but he couldn't refuse an order from his Martial Uncle, and could only agree. Right now, Yang Guo was busy being pleased with himself for making Zhao Zhijing call himself a mad dog, and didn't really digest what his Grand Master was saying. After Qiu Chuji had walked away about twenty paces, Zhao Zhijing's blood rose to the surface, he couldn't resist and raised his hand; he wanted to hit Yang Guo across the face again.

Yang Guo shouted out, "Grand Master Qiu!"

Qiu Chuji was startled and turned around, asking, "What's the matter?"

Zhao Zhijing's hand was in midair, he did not dare to hit out, he was caught in an embarrassing situation and he

reluctantly pulled his arm back and scratched the hair by his temples.

Yang Guo ran towards Qiu Chuji, and said, "Grand Master, after you've left, there will be no one to look after me, there are many Martial Uncles who want to hit me."

Qiu Chuji's faced changed and shouted, "Rubbish! Is there such a thing?" On the outside he appeared strict, but he was worried inside, he thought about how hard it is for an child to be on his own and clearly said, "Zhijing, you take good care of him, if anything happens, I'll be asking after you." Zhao Zhijing could only accept.

After supper, Yang Guo slowly walked towards the room where his master was residing, and shouted out, "Master!"

It was the time of day when they were refining the kung fu; Zhao Zhijing had already sat on his couch for half a day thinking, "That child is very mischievous, if I don't tame him quickly, when his martial arts are high, who else could restrain him? But Martial Uncle Qiu and Master ordered me to teach him kung fu; if I don't teach him then I am not following orders." He kept searching in his mind but couldn't think of anything, he saw Yang Guo entering the room slowly, his eyes lit up, he gave a laugh in an ostentatious manner as he thought of a plan, "I've got it, he doesn't know anything about our sect's martial arts, I'll just teach him the formula to our sect's skills, but I won't teach how to practice it. Even if he remembers the few hundred sentences of the formulae what use is it to him? If Master or the Martial Uncles ask about this, I'll push the blame away and say it was his fault for not working hard enough." Now his mind was made up, with a kind and pleasant expression he said to Yang Guo, "Guo'er, come here."

Yang Guo said, "Are you going to hit me?"

Zhao Zhijing said, "I'm going to teach you kung fu, why should I hit you?"

Yang Guo saw that he was lively, and had come out with a surprise, he slowly entered, but he was on his guard, afraid that he has some evil scheme. Zhao Zhijing pretended nothing was going on and said, "Our Quanzhen sect's kung fu is learned from within to the outside, it is very different to other types of kung fu. I am now going to pass on to you the formula of our sect's internal energy, you must remember it clearly." He then passed on the formulae to the sect's internal energy theories, and recited a segment.

Yang Guo just listened to it once, and had already memorized it, and thought, "That old goat hates me, why would he teach me real kung fu? He's probably trying to make a fool out of me and teach me some useless fake formulae."

After a while, he pretended to forget, and asked Zhao Zhijing to repeat it again. Zhao Zhijing repeated it again.

The next day, Yang Guo asked his teacher again, and heard that it was exactly the same as it was the day before, he then believed they were real, if the formulae were made up, then it would be impossible that every single word was the same when repeated three times.

Ten days passed this way, Zhao Zhijing only taught him the formulae, and did not say one word on how to practice them. On the tenth day, Zhao Zhijing took him to Ma Yu, and said that he has taught him their sect's formulae for practicing internal energy, and told Yang Guo to recite it to Grand Master. Yang Guo recited the whole thing; he didn't say one word wrong. Ma Yu was pleased, and praised him for being so clever. He was a kind and generous Taoist, a gentleman; he would never have thought that Zhao Zhijing had such a scheme.

Summer went and autumn arrived, autumn passed and winter came, a few months passed in the wink of an eye. Yang Guo had memorized a stack of formulae, but he had not learned an ounce of kung fu, he had not improved his martial arts or his internal energy since he had been on the mountain. A few days after he first began to remember and recite the formulae, he knew that his teacher was making a fool out of him, but he didn't dare to complain. But he had no other ideas; the headmaster of the sect was peaceful and soft hearted, if he told him, he would only reproach Zhao Zhijing with a few words. He was scared that the old goat would conjure up some other plan to torture him; he could only wait for his Grand Master to come back before he could do anything. But after many months, Qiu Chuji still had not returned. It was fortunate that Yang Guo did not respect the martial arts of the Quanzhen sect, he didn't care if he learned them or not, but because Zhao Zhijing had used such a plan, he hated him even more. Yang Guo didn't want to suffer for no reason so he pretended to be even more respectful to him.

Zhao Zhijing felt pleased with himself and thought, "You caused offence to your master, in the end who suffers?"

Time passed and it was soon the last month of the lunar year, a custom that had been passed down by Wang Chongyang requests that in the three days before the eve of the new year, all the sect's students will spar with each other, testing how much each student has advanced in the last year. Every student knew the date was approaching, and each one of them trained non-stop.

On the day of the celebration, the students of the Seven Masters of Quanzhen had their own competitions, forming several small competitions. The students formed seven groups, the disciples and grand disciples of Ma Yu forming one group, Qiu Chuji, Wang Chuyi and the others disciples and grand disciples formed the others. Although Tan

Chuduan was dead, his disciples and grand disciples still flourished and formed a group. Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji and the others often thought about his early death, and so would pay special attention to his students. Because of this, at each year's duel, the students of Tan Chuduan would not lose to the other students.

After this year's incident at Chongyang Palace, where the Quanzhen sect was almost overthrown, all of the students thought that although the sect's kung fu is famous throughout the world for its orthodox style, they became a good challenge for many schools and sects. The title they had is highly dangerous, so everyone trained harder than ever before.

Wang Chongyang founded the Quanzhen sect and he was the sect's first generation. May Yu and the other seven of them were his disciples, and they made up the second generation. Zhao Zhijing, Yin Zhiping, Cheng Yaojia are the students of the seven, and they formed the third generation. Yang Guo was therefore in the fourth generation of the sect.

After the morning meal, the Shining Jade elder's students who included Zhao Zhijing and Cui Chifang and others assembled in the southeastern plain, where they dueled with each other. Wang Chuyi was not present, so his eldest student Zhao Zhijing was in charge of the proceedings. The fourth generation students demonstrated their punches and kicks, then with swords and spears, after that they performed with projectiles and finally showed off their internal energy, with Zhao Zhijing and the other third generation students in the group as the judges.

Yang Guo was the last one to enter the sect out of all of them; he sat aside and watched. He saw Taoists who were older than him, some who were about the same age as him and others who weren't Taoists demonstrate impressive skills, but

he wasn't envious, instead he was full of hate. Zhao Zhijing saw that something was up with him, and wanted to make a fool out of him again, and so waited for two Taoists to finish competing with projectiles and then called out, "Come here Yang Guo!"

Yang Guo stopped for a second and thought, "You haven't taught me an ounce of martial arts, why are you calling me out?" Zhao Zhijing called out again, "Yang Guo, come here now!"

Yang Guo had no choice but to walk to where they were sitting, and then made a bow and said, "Disciple Yang Guo hereby greets teacher." Quanzhen sect was made up mostly of Taoists, but there were some members who were like Yang Guo and not Taoists, and so he performed the greeting for these members.

Zhao Zhijing pointed out to the Taoist in the arena who had just won and said, "He's only a few years older than you; you go and compete with him."

Yang Guo said, "Disciple does not know any martial arts, how can I compete with apprentice brother?"

Zhao Zhijing scolded, "I've taught you for half a year, how can you say you don't know any martial arts? What have you been doing for the last few months?"

Yang Guo had nothing to say and hung his head.

Zhao Zhijing said, "You are lazy and mischievous, you don't practice, of course your punches and kicks will become rusty. I ask you "What use is there to study the scheme of life? The heart dies, and passion with it." What are the next two lines?"

Yang Guo replied, "The pure air fills the tools of movement; The light of the soul shines brilliantly on the body."

Zhao Zhijing said, "Correct, I ask you again, "The teacher passes on the secret and comprehended at first; eventually there is no me." What are the next two lines?"

Yang Guo replied, "Every year the dust is ground to the end; One side of the soul dazzles to emptiness."

Zhao Zhijing gave a wry smile, and said, "Very good, not one word wrong. Go and use those formulae, enter the arena and compete with your apprentice brother."

Yang Guo was startled once again, and said. "I won't."

Zhao Zhijing was pleased with himself, his face was furious and he shouted, "You've learned the formulae but don't practice and only make up excuses, go down to the arena now."

Within those few lines are the most important ideas in cultivating internal energy, teaching that the heart must be calm, refining the chi, but each line needs a fist or kick to accompany it, only then will a set of Quanzhen sect's fist be formed. The rest of the Taoists heard Yang Guo reciting the formulae with their own ears, and not one word out of place, and knew that he was scared of competing, and tried to encourage him by ridiculing and laughing mockingly. The students of the Quanzhen sect are all good people, but after their battle with Guo Jing where the Taoists were beaten to the ground, he had offended many people. Many of them shifted their anger onto Yang Guo, and wished misfortune on him, although they might not have really meant it, they just wanted a way to vent their anger.

Yang Guo saw many people were urging him on, some were saying harsh words to get at him, he couldn't control his anger and made a decision and thought, "Today, I'm not going to care what happens to me." He then jumped into the arena, and moved his arms, running straight into the young

Taoist. The Taoist saw that he wasn't showing respect for the opponent, and was not following the sect's rules by politely requesting a duel; he was shocked. He saw that Yang Guo was running around and fighting like a madman, he was surprised and moved back a few steps. Yang Guo had already decided to disregard his own life and ferociously attacked, every step going forward. The young Taoist moved back a few steps and saw that Yang Guo's lower body was unstable, he slanted his body and threw a kick, the stance "Sweeping Wind Descending Leaves" (feng sao luo ye), and swept his leg. Yang Guo didn't know how to dodge, he couldn't stay upright and fell down on the ground, hitting his nose and blood flowed.

The Taoists saw how he fell, and some laughed. Yang Guo flipped around and picked himself up, he didn't wipe the blood away; he dropped his head and jumped at the Taoist. The Taoist saw Yang Guo jumping at him and dodged to the side. Yang Guo did not use any orthodox kung fu, he reached with his two arms, and grabbed the opponent's left leg. The young Taoist's right palm came down, the stance "Wiping the Dust" (kai mo chen gou), it was a way to rid obstructions on your lower body. Yang Guo had not learned any martial arts when he was on Peach Blossom Island, and had not received any useful skills while at Chongyang palace, and didn't have a clue as to what stance the opponent would use. He only heard a thudding noise, he felt a sharp pain in his shoulder; he had been struck fiercely by a punch. The more he suffered, the more ferocious he became, he head butted the opponent's right leg; the Taoist's leg became unsteady and he was forced onto the ground by him. Yang Guo whirled his fist, and ferociously struck out at his head.

The young Taoist gained victory from the jaws of defeat, his elbow struck Yang Guo's chest fiercely, causing him severe pain, and used the chance to escape. He pushed and swung his hand, and caused Yang Guo to drop again; he had used

the stance “No Debts No Dues” (wu qian wu yu). The young Taoist checked and said, “Apprentice brother Yang, thank you!”

Originally when dueling amongst each other from the same sect, once there was a clear winner the duel would stop, but he didn’t know Yang Guo was not finished. He came rushing forwards again. After two or three moves, Yang Guo was once again on the ground, but he became bolder as he went on, his punches and kicks coming out faster and faster.

Zhao Zhijing shouted, “Yang Guo, you’ve already lost, why are you still carrying on?”

Yang Guo ignored him, and kicked out; he had no plans to back down. The rest of the Taoists first thought it was funny but then thought, “When did our sect have such a reckless and rough kung fu?” After, they saw that he was fighting for his life and were afraid that something might happen. Many people called out, “Forget it...forget it. Its only sparring amongst apprentice brothers, there is no need to be so serious.”

They fought for another while; the young Taoist became frightened; all he did now was dodge and block, not daring to come close to him. There’s a saying: One man fighting for his life cannot be stopped by ten thousand men. Yang Guo had suffered for half a year on Mount Zhongnan, and he let it all out. The young Taoist’s skills were higher than Yang Guo’s, but how could he cope? He saw that he couldn’t block anymore, he could only hurry around the arena avoiding him.

Yang Guo chased after him, and shouted, “Rotten Taoist, you’ve had fun hitting me, now you want to run?”

The ten people who were watching from the side at that time, eight or nine of them were Taoists, when they heard him say rotten Taoist, scoundrel Taoist and other insults, they were

angry but also thought it was funny. They all said, "That kid needs a good lesson."

The young Taoist was chased and harried, he was scared and shouted, "Master, master!" and hoped the Zhao Zhijing would come out and stop Yang Guo. Zhao Zhijing shouted, but Yang Guo did not take any notice.

When Yang Guo didn't stop, a shout came out from the crowd, and out came a large Taoist, he stepped in and grabbed Yang Guo's neck, picked him up, and struck three times across the face, the slaps were fierce, half of Yang Guo's face immediately swelled up. Yang Guo was dazed by the three slaps, when he looked up, it was the Taoist whom he had a run in with, Lu Qingdu. When Yang Guo first came to Mount Zhongnan, he was almost burned to death by Yang Guo, after that, his apprentice brothers ridiculed him saying he got outsmarted by a little kid. He had always kept this in his mind, now he saw Yang Guo was being rebellious; he couldn't resist and reacted.

When Yang Guo saw that it was Lu Qingdu, he knew that he was out of luck, and since he was being held up, he couldn't fight. Lu Qingdu smiled wryly, and struck him across the face three more times, and shouted, "You don't listen to master's orders, you are our sect's traitor, and anyone can hit you." He raised his hand again, wanting to hit out once more.

Zhao Zhijing's apprentice brother Cui Zhifang had seen Yang Guo fight and he had not used any of their sect's kung fu. He knew what kind of character Zhao Zhijing was, so he was afraid that there was another reason for all of this; he feared someone was going to get hurt so he called out, "Qingdu, stop!"

Lu Qingdu heard his Martial Uncle's shout, although he didn't want to, he had to put Yang Guo down and said, "Martial Uncle don't you know, that child is extremely mischievous

and crafty, if we don't punish him heavily, how can there be order within our sect?"

Cui Zhifang ignored him, and went over to Yang Guo, he saw that both sides of Yang Guo's face were heavily swollen, there were blue and purple marks, his nose and mouth were bloody; he looked a very sorry sight. He softly said, "Yang Guo, your master taught you martial arts, why didn't you work hard and practice, and instead causing fights among your apprentice brothers?"

Yang Guo angrily said, "What master? He hasn't taught me anything."

Cui Zhifang said, "I heard with my own ears you reciting the formulae, not one word was wrong."

Yang Guo remembered how on Peach Blossom Island Huang Rong had made him read books and recite manuscripts, and knew that Zhao Zhijing had taught him something that was not related to practicing martial arts. He said, "I don't know how to incorporate them, what use is being able to recite a few words?"

Cui Zhifang pretended to be angry, and wanted to test that he really did not know any of their sect's kung fu; he then put on a face, and said, "You are talking to a senior, how can you have no manners?" He stretched out his arm and pushed his shoulder. Cui Zhifang is one of most skilled students of the third generation, although he can't be compared with Zhao Zhijing and Yin Zhiping, he was skilled, his internal energy high. His push was gentle yet it's strength was judged just right, but he felt Yang Guo's shoulder lean to the side, his internal energy emerged, and had already dispersed with just under half the force in his push. Although he stumbled back a few steps, he did not fall down.

Cui Zhifang was startled, he became suspicious and thought, "He is young, and has only entered our sect for just over half a year, how can he have such strong internal energy? He has good internal energy, just now when he was dueling; he was fighting madly, could there be something wrong here?" He didn't know that Yang Guo had practiced Ouyang Feng's formulae for internal energy cultivation; unwittingly his internal energy has gone up another level. The White Camel Mountain's sect's internal energy is easy to learn, progress can be made very quickly, but it cannot compare with the Quanzhen sect's kung fu foundations. Within the first ten years of practicing, the students of White Camel Mountain's internal energy will have increased very quickly until ten years pass, then the students of Quanzhen sect will have slowly caught up and start to overtake it. The two sect's internal energies are very different, but because Cui Zhifang had just given a push without any real intent, it was hard for him to tell the difference.

Yang Guo had been pushed by him, and was winded, and knew that he wanted to fight him. Right now, he feared neither heaven nor earth, even if Qiu Chuji was here in person, he would still fight him, why would he care about Cui Zhifang? He then lowered his head and rushed forward, aiming for his lower abdomen. How could Cui Zhifang mess around with a child, he smiled and stepped aside, he wanted to see his real kung fu, so he said, "Qingdu, come and duel with apprentice brother Yang, watch yourself and don't be too severe!"

Lu Qingdu could not believe those words, he immediately jumped in front of Yang Guo, his left palm came down, Yang Guo escaped to the right, Lu Qingdu hit out his right palm, this palm was the "Tiger's Way Hand", the strength behind it was not weak, a thudding sound, as Yang Guo was struck in the chest. If Yang Guo had not been practicing the White Camel Mountain's internal energy, he would have definitely

thrown up a pool of blood. He felt a severe pain in his chest; his face was as white as a sheet of paper. Lu Qingdu saw that he had not felled Yang Guo with this palm, and secretly felt that he was careless, his right fist now came down at Yang Guo. Yang Guo stretched out his arms to attack; he didn't understand the finer points of fist skills; so he didn't know the best way to repel this incoming attack. Lu Qingdu moved his right fist and came out with his left fist, another thudding sound as he hit Yang Guo in the stomach. Yang Guo bent down with pain. Lu Qingdu didn't hold back, a right palm came crashing down on Yang Guo's neck. He wanted to hurt him, wanting him to fall over now, wanting to avenge what he did to him. His life was on the line now but he still did not fall down, but now Yang Guo was dazed and didn't have the strength to retaliate.

Cui Zhijing knew then that he didn't know any martial arts skills and said, "Qingdu, hold!"

Lu Qingdu said to Yang Guo, "Do you respect me now?"

Yang Guo shouted, "You damn Taoist, I'm going to kill you one day!"

Lu Qingdu was furious, and punched him twice in the nose.

Yang Guo was beaten badly, he was wobbling and was about to fall down. He didn't know where he was when suddenly a flow of warm chi surged through his "dan tian", and he saw that Lu Qingdu was about to throw a third punch at him. There was no way to dodge, no where to escape, he spontaneously bent both legs and gave out a loud shout, his palm pushed out, hitting Lu Qingdu in the stomach. He saw a large body fly through the air, a thudding sound as dust flew everywhere in the arena, falling about ten feet away. The body was lying on the ground, and didn't move.

The crowd of Taoists at the side watched Lu Qingdu taking advantage of his size and bullying someone smaller than him, and hitting Yang Guo venomously. It wasn't right, the older generation apart from Zhao Zhijing came over to stop him, but they didn't know there had been a sudden reversal of fortune. Lu Qingdu had been sent flying by Yang Guo's palm, his body lying there like a corpse not moving, everyone was astounded and rushed over to take a closer look.

Normally Yang Guo would not have been able to use the "Toad Stance", but in a life threatening situation, it could be used automatically. The first time this happened was on Peach Blossom Island where he knocked out Wu Xiuwen. After many months, his internal energy had increased; that, plus the fact that he hated Lu Qingdu, and it was comparable to the hate he felt for the Wu brothers, with this in mind, he was able to knock him flying across the arena. He heard the other Taoists say, "Oh no, it's terrible, he's dead! He's not breathing; his internal organs have been hurt! Quickly go and tell the leader and bring him here."

Yang Guo knew he had caused a major incident, no one was thinking in the midst of this chaos, he picked himself up and ran away. The Taoists were too busy with Lu Qingdu's life and didn't notice that Yang Guo had slipped away. Zhao Zhijing saw that Lu Qingdu's eyes were rolled back, and didn't know whether he was dead or alive. He was startled and angry, and shouted out, "Yang Guo, Yang Guo, where did you learn this witchcraft?" His skills were high, but he had remained at Chongyang Palace for most of the time, he didn't know much, of course he would not recognize the techniques of the "Toad Stance".

The Taoists turned around, but didn't see Yang Guo. Zhao Zhijing then gave out an order, and told them to go and

capture Yang Guo; they thought how far could a small child like him get to in a short space of time?

Yang Guo didn't know the roads, and just ran, he eventually chose to dive into a forest. After a while, he heard shouts behind him, everyone was calling out from all directions, "Yang Guo, Yang Guo, come out quickly!" He was nervous, and ran away again; he felt someone was in front of him, a Taoist had seen him, and came after him. Yang Guo quickly turned around; in the west was another Taoist, who called out, "Here! Over here." Yang Guo crouched down and crawled underneath a bush. The Taoists were too big to crawl through; they had to go around it to find him. Yang Guo managed to escape but didn't know where to go. After Yang Guo went through the bush, he headed straight and after running for a while, he heard the voices become quieter but he still didn't dare stop. He avoided the paths, and ran through the long grass and rocks; he became bruised and cut up all over. When he couldn't move any more he sat down on a rock to catch his breath. He sat for a little while, but then he thought; "Escape quickly, escape quickly." But his legs felt like they weighed a ton, he almost couldn't stand up straight. He heard someone laugh coldly from behind, Yang Guo was startled and turned around, his heart jumped out of his mouth, as he saw a man with deep brows and flared eyes, a beard hanging to his chest, it was Zhao Zhijing.

The two stared at each other for several minutes; during this time they did not move an inch. Yang Guo suddenly shouted and turned around to run away. Zhao Zhijing went forward and stretched out his arm and grabbed his chest. Yang Guo jumped forward and it was lucky he gained a few inches and managed to escape his clutches. He then picked up a rock, and flung it backwards with all his strength. Zhao Zhijing swerved to the side, he increased his speed and the distance between the two closed. Yang Guo ran madly for about twenty steps, and saw a deep ditch in front of him but he had

run out places to run to; he didn't know whether below was a deep valley or a mountain gorge but he didn't give it a thought and threw his body forward.

Zhao Zhijing ran to the steep ditch and looked on, he saw Yang Guo rolling through the grass down the slope, and eventually into a cluster of trees. From where he was standing to the bottom was about sixty or seventy feet, he didn't dare jump down; he quickly ran down the grassy slope. He saw the trail of flattened grass left heading into the forest, but he didn't see a trace of Yang Guo. As he went deeper it became tighter, eventually so dense that light was shut out. He went forward for about one hundred feet, and then suddenly stopped; he was now on the land of the Tomb of the Living Dead where the sect's ancestor had spent his younger years. Their sect had a strict rule: no one is allowed to take one step into the place. "Had Yang Guo escaped into here?" He wasn't pleased, he shouted, "Yang Guo, Yang Guo come out quickly!"

He shouted a few times, the forest became silent, he became bold and took a few steps forward and saw a large stone slab. He took a closer look. Some words were engraved on it, "Outsiders stop now". Zhao Zhijing paced back and forth for an hour, he then loudly called out, "Yang Guo you little scoundrel, if you don't come out I'll catch you and beat you to death." After he said this, he suddenly heard a sound coming from the forest, he saw a grey mist moving, and a swarm of white bees came out from the leaves and flew towards him.

Zhao Zhijing was startled, he waved his sleeve trying to push away the bees, his internal strength was deep, there was considerable power in his sweeps, but after waving many times, the swarm of bees became two, one coming from the front, the other coming from behind. Zhao Zhijing became even more frightened; he didn't dare to be slow and waved

his arms frantically, protecting his body. The swarms dispersed, but then came back to attack from all directions from top to bottom, east to west, north and south. Zhao Zhijing didn't dare to defend anymore, he protected his face and turned around and ran out of the forest.

The swarm of Jade Bees followed, although they weren't very quick there wasn't anywhere to hide. Zhao Zhijing headed east, the Jade Bees followed and headed east, he headed west, the Jade Bees followed and headed west. His arm movements became slower; two bees flew through the gap and stung his right cheek. In a short while, Zhao Zhijing felt numb and it was hard to move, his internal organs began to itch, he thought, "My time is up today!"

Eventually he couldn't keep his legs still, and rolled in the grass by the forest, crying out loudly. The swarm of bees flew around his body for a while, and then returned to the forest.

End of Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 - Tomb of the Living Dead

Translated by Noodles



Yang Guo climbed onto the bed; his body shivered and his teeth chattered noisily. He saw Xiao Long Nu take out a rope, and tied one end to a hook on the eastern side of the room, and tied the other end to a hook on the western side of the room, the rope was off the floor at a height similar to that of a person. She lightly jumped up and lay across the rope, using it as a bed.

Yang Guo had fallen down the hill, and rolled into the forest's long grass, he passed out, he didn't know how much time had passed when he suddenly felt his body being pierced, he opened his eyes and saw countless white bees flying around his body, he heard the buzzing sounds, then he felt his whole body itch to the bone, a white blur was all he saw, he didn't know whether it was real or an illusion, and he fainted again.

Some time passed when he suddenly felt a cold and fragrant liquid in his mouth, slowly flowing into his throat and then into his stomach but felt that he couldn't speak; he opened his eyes and suddenly saw just two inches in front of him an ugly face full of warts and pimples, the eyes were fixed on him. Yang Guo was startled, and fainted again. The ugly person stretched out the left hand and held his jaw, the right hand held a container, and then poured some more of the sweet liquid down his throat.

Yang Guo felt that the strange itching pain he had slowly diminish, and noticed that he was now sleeping on a bed, and knew that the ugly person had rescued him, he smiled, trying to say thank you. The ugly person also smiled, she finished feeding him the liquid and then put the container down on a table. Yang Guo saw that her smile was also extremely ugly, but within the ugliness was a soft and gentle look, he was touched and there was a warm feeling in his heart, he pleaded, "Grandma, don't let my master catch me!"

The ugly old maid softly said, "Child, who is your master?" Yang Guo had not heard such a soft and caring voice for such a long while, he became hot and started to cry. The old maid's left hand held his hand, she didn't say anything to console him, she just smiled and looked at him, her eyes were full of love and care; she waited for him to finish crying and then said, "Do you feel better?"

Yang Guo heard her tender voice; he couldn't help it and cried again. She wiped away his tears and comforted him, "Good child, good child, don't cry, don't cry, the pain will go away in a little while." The more caring she was, the harder Yang Guo cried.

Suddenly a soft voice from outside a hanging curtain said, "Grandma Sun, the child doesn't stop crying, what is wrong?"

Yang Guo raised his head; he saw a white jade hand lift the hanging curtain, a girl entered. The girl wore an old fashioned delicate white dress, it was as if her body was covered with smoke and mist, she looked like she was about sixteen or seventeen years of age. Apart from her black hair, her body was as white as snow, her face was extremely beautiful, with just a hint of redness on her cheeks, and her face was pale and white. Yang Guo blushed, he immediately stopped crying; he lowered his head and felt slightly embarrassed. From the corner of his eyes he took a quick peek, and saw that she was looking at him; he quickly lowered his head.

Grandma Sun laughed and said, "I don't have any ideas, you better take a look." The young girl came by to the bedside, she looked at the wounds that were caused by the bee stings; she stretched out her hand and touched his forehead and felt that he wasn't feverish. When her hand touched Yang Guo's forehead, he felt that it was extremely cold; he couldn't help but shiver a little. The young girl said, "It is

nothing. You've already drunk the Jade Bee honey; you'll recover in half a day. Why did you enter the forest?"

Yang Guo raised his head, and looked into her eyes, he thought that she was beautiful, without comparison, but she exuded an icy and emotionless aura. She was as hard and as cold as ice and it was difficult to tell whether she was pleased or angry, a friend or foe. He thought, "Is that girl made out of crystal or made out of snow? Is she a person, a ghost, or an angel?" Although he heard her voice was soft there was no warmth in it, he didn't dare to reply.

Grandma Sun laughed and said, "Sister Long is the owner of this place, if she asks you something, you'd better reply!"

The beautiful girl in white was the owner of the Tomb of the Living Dead, Xiao Longnu. In reality her eighteenth birthday had passed, but because she had lived in the tomb since she was little and hadn't seen the light of day, the internal energy skill she has practiced restricted her emotions. That is why she looked younger than she really was. Grandma Sun was her teacher's maid, but since her teacher left the world, the two looked after each other. She heard the bees, and knew someone had entered the forest near the tomb, so Grandma Sun had come out to see who it was. She saw Yang Guo poisoned and unconscious on the ground; she rescued him and brought him back here. According to their sect's rules, no outsiders can enter the tomb even one step; a man entering the tomb was even worse. But Yang Guo was young, and she saw that his whole body was covered with wounds, so Grandma Sun could not ignore him and broke the rules to save him. Yang Guo got up from the stone bed and got onto the floor. He kowtowed to Grandma Sun and Xiao Longnu and said; "Disciple Yang Guo greets Grandma Sun, and greets Gu Gu (Auntie) Long."

Grandma Sun laughed then quickly went over to pick him up and said, "Ah, your name is Yang Guo, there is no need for such formalities." She has lived in the tomb for a few years, and had never interacted with outsiders, she saw that Yang Guo was handsome and polite; she was pleased. Xiao Longnu only nodded her head, and sat on a stone chair next to the bed.

Grandma Sun said, "How did you get here? How come you are wounded? Who beat you like this?" After she asked her questions she didn't wait for him to reply and went out to get some dim sum and cakes, and insisted on him having some.

Yang Guo ate a few delicacies, and told her his life story from start to finish. He was good with words, his story was already engaging, he added his emotions to it and it became even more touching. Grandma Sun kept on sighing, sometimes she would add her own comments, and her words all favored Yang Guo. She said that Huang Rong was a biased woman and unjust in her actions, and commented that Zhao Zhijing was narrow minded, bullying a child. Xiao Longnu didn't make a sound and sat still on the chair, but when Yang Guo mentioned Li Mochou, she and Grandma Sun looked at each other. When Grandma Sun heard Yang Guo finish, she stretched out her arms and hugged him, and said, "My poor child."

Xiao Longnu slowly got up, and said, "His wounds are not serious, Grandma, send him out!" Both Grandma Sun and Yang Guo were startled. Yang Guo loudly said, "I won't return, I'd rather die."

Grandma Sun said, "Miss, if he returns to Chongyang Palace, his master will punish him."

Xiao Longnu said, "You return with him, find his master and tell him there is no need to punish the child."

Grandma Sun said, "Ah, it's another sect's business, we can't do anything about it."

Xiao Longnu said, "Take a bottle of Jade Bee honey with you, and then tell them, the old Taoist will listen."

Her words seemed to be suggestions, but there was strictness within her tone, it was hard for a sect member to disobey. Grandma Sun sighed, she knew she always spoke her mind, and there was no use to try to argue. When she looked at Yang Guo; her eyes had a different intent.

Yang Guo got up and made a bow, and said, "Thank you Grandma and Gu Gu for tending to my wounds, I'll leave now!"

Grandma Sun said, "Where are you going to go?"

Yang Guo stood still for a while and then said, "The world is a big place, and there are many places for me to go." But he didn't really know where he would go, his face revealed a mournful expression.

Grandma Sun said, "Child, it's because Miss doesn't dare to let you stay, it's a rule of our sect not to allow outsiders, don't be sad."

Yang Guo raised his head and said, "Grandma why do you say this? We'll meet again some day."

He spoke like an adult, but his voice was young, when Grandma Sun heard him she thought it was funny, but also felt sorry for him. She saw that his eyes were watery, and he was holding back the tears. She said to Xiao Longnu, "Miss, it's the middle of the night, why don't we let him stay until morning and let him leave then?"

Xiao Longnu shook her head and said, "Grandma, have you forgotten the rules set by Master?"

Grandma Sun sighed and got up, she quietly said to Yang Guo, "Come, child, I'll give you an object to play with."

Yang Guo stretched out his hand and wiped his eyes, he lowered his head and rushed out of the door and said, "I don't want it, I'd rather die than return to the Taoists."

Grandma Sun shook her head and said, "You don't know the way, I'll lead you out." She held his hand. Outside the room, all Yang Guo saw was darkness, he was led by Grandma Sun, he felt them going around one corner and then another, he didn't know how Grandma Sun recognized her way in these dark and twisty paths.

Although the Tomb of the Living Dead was called a tomb, in actual fact it was a large spacious underground storeroom. Before Wang Chongyang had started to fight the Jin, he had used thousands of man-hours and many years to construct the tomb. He secretly stored some supplies there, and it became an important base in the area. From the outside it looked like a tomb, but this was to disguise the building from the ears and eyes of the Jin, and even if they did enter, the tomb had countless traps to repel the invaders.

If Wang Chongyang's soldiers failed in battle, they would retreat into the tomb. There were many rooms within the tomb, there were complicated tunnels, if outsiders entered, in the dark or even with bright torches and candles they would get lost easily.

The two exited the tomb, and in the middle of the forest they suddenly heard someone from the outside clearly shouting out, "It's Quanzhen's disciple Yin Zhiping, master has ordered me to greet Miss Long." The voice was spaced out; it came from a distance.

Grandma Sun said, "There are people outside looking for you, don't go out."

Yang Guo was angry and alarmed, his body shivered and said, "Grandma, don't worry about me. A person should be responsible for their actions, I accidentally killed someone, let them kill me." When he finished he ran out.

Grandma Sun said, "I'll follow you."

Grandma Sun held Yang Guo's hand and exited the forest, arriving in the open land in front of the forest. Under moonlight they saw six or seven Taoists standing together, another four of them were holding torches, and they carried the heavily wounded Zhao Zhijing and Lu Qingdu. The Taoists saw Yang Guo, they said a few quiet words amongst themselves and all took a few steps forward.

Yang Guo escaped from Grandma Sun's grasp and ran forward and said, "I'm here, if you want to kill or torture me, it's up to you."

The Taoists could not believe that such a small child was so bold; it was completely unexpected. A Taoist came forward and grabbed Yang Guo's neck and dragged him. Yang Guo chuckled and said, "I'm not going to escape, what's the hurry?" That Taoist was Zhao Zhijing's eldest student; he knew that his teacher suffered the pain of the Jade Bee's sting because of Yang Guo. He was in extreme pain and didn't know whether his life could be saved. He had always respected his teacher, and felt that the worst offence anyone can do is to rebel against their teacher. When he saw Yang Guo coming, he threw a punch at Yang Guo's head.

Grandma Sun and the Taoists had always been on relatively good terms, but when she saw Yang Guo being dragged; she wasn't pleased at all. Now he is being beaten, how could she control her temper? She immediately took a large step forward; she swept her sleeve and brushed away the Taoist's hand. The Taoist felt a severe pain in his wrist, and automatically loosened his hand. He was about to shout

when Grandma Sun picked up Yang Guo, turned around, and walked away.

When they first saw her, they thought that she was just an old and feeble maid, but she was rapid in her movements in taking Yang Guo. The Taoists stood still for a while; she had already taken Yang Guo about ten feet away. Three Taoists angrily shouted, "Let him go!" and rushed forward.

Grandma Sun stopped and turned around; she chuckled and said, "You men want to stop us?"

Yin Zhiping knew that the people of the Tomb of the Living Dead and his sect had a deep affiliation, and didn't dare to offend them, he quickly stopped everyone and said, "Everyone spread out, and show manners in front of Senior."

He then walked up, and greeted Grandma Sun and said, "Disciple Yin Zhiping greets Senior."

Grandma Sun said, "What do you want?"

Yin Zhiping said, "That child is a disciple of the Quanzhen, can Senior please return him."

Grandma Sun's brows rose, she yelled, "You beat him when you were still in front of me. When you take him back to your palace, you are going to find ways to torture him. You want me to release him; not in a million years!"

Yin Zhiping kept his temper and said, "That child is extremely disobedient and mischievous, he showed no respect for his seniors, and broke the rules of our sect. In the Wulin world, one of the most important rules is to respect your master and seniors, it is right to blame him for his troubles."

Grandma Sun shouted, "Not respecting seniors; its just words." She pointed to the Taoist lying on the stretcher, Lu

Qingdu, and said, "The child dueled with that fat Taoist, it was your Quanzhen sect's rules. To start with, he didn't want to compete, but you lot forced him into the arena. If you are going to fight, of course there is going to be a winner and a loser, if that fat Taoist is useless, who else can you blame?" She was already ugly, but now she was angry and swelled up, she was even more frightening. In the middle of her words, another ten Taoists came and stood behind Yin Zhiping, discussing the situation; they didn't know who the loud ugly old woman was.

Yin Zhiping thought to himself, hurting Lu Qingdu wasn't Yang Guo's fault, but he couldn't admit they were wrong in front of outsiders and said, "This matter is complicated, we will inform our leader, and let him be the judge of this. Can senior please return the child?"

Grandma Sun chuckled, "How could your leader be a fair judge? The Quanzhen sect from Wang Chongyang to now, there hasn't been one good person. Otherwise, how could you live so close and yet you don't associate with us?"

Yin Zhiping thought, "It's your sect who don't associate with us, how can you blame our Quanzhen sect? You've insulted our sect leader with your words and that may be a bit too disrespectful." But he didn't want to say anything to harm the relationship between the two sects, and said, "Senior please forgive us, if our sect has offended you, then our sect leader will apologize to you publicly."

Yang Guo held Grandma Sun's neck and whispered into her ear, "That Taoist is sly, grandma don't fall into his trap."

Grandma Sun had brought up Xiao Longnu for the last eighteen years, and she had a desire to bring up a boy. Yang Guo was warm towards her like she was towards him; she was extremely pleased. She made up her mind and thought,

“Whatever they say, they are not going to take the child away.”

She then called out. “You insist on taking the child, how exactly are you going to torture him?”

Yin Zhiping was startled, and said, “This disciple here and his father are from the same sect, I wouldn’t dare to harm a friend’s son, senior you can relax.”

Grandma Sun shook her head, “This old woman never listens to outsider’s words, leave me.” As she said this she continued on her way into the forest.

Zhao Zhijing was lying on the stretcher, the wounds from the Jade Bees were unbearable but he knew what was going on. He heard that Yin Zhiping couldn’t argue with Grandma Sun and the more he heard the angrier he got, he suddenly leapt off the stretcher, chased after Grandma Sun and shouted, “He is my disciple, if I want to beat him and insult him, it’s my choice. Not letting the master order his disciple, where is there such a rule in Wulin?”

Grandma Sun saw his face had swollen so much that he looked like a pig. When she heard these words, she knew that he was Yang Guo’s master, she didn’t have anything to say at the moment and could only make her way forward thinking, “I won’t let you order him, what can you do?”

Zhao Zhijing shouted, “What relation is that child to you? How can you stick your nose into this matter?”

Grandma Sun was startled, and shouted, “He isn’t a member of the Quanzhen sect anymore. He is now a member of our sect and has elected my master Xiao Longnu as his master; under heaven only Xiao Longnu can command him. There’s no need for you to meddle.”

When she said this, the Taoists were shocked. According to the rules of Jianghu, without the consent of your teacher, one must not have another teacher, even if that other teacher is ten times more skilled than their teacher. You are not allowed to do as you please and spread your wings whenever you want; to do so, they will have committed one of the worst offences there is. They will be despised by their peers in the Jianghu world.

When Guo Jing took the Jiangnan Seven Freaks as his masters, and later learned from Hong Qigong, he didn't call him master. Only later did Ke Zhen'E and the others allow this and he and Hong Qigong had a master disciple relationship.

Because Zhao Zhijing had made Grandma Sun speechless, and because she had never associated with people of Wulin she didn't know any rules. When she said what she said she didn't know she had broken a major rule.

Most of the Taoists originally felt sorry for Yang Guo, and felt that Zhao Zhijing had not done the right things. But when they heard that Yang Guo had openly expelled himself from the sect...well, there hadn't been such a thing since the founding of the Quanzhen sect and they were incensed.

Zhao Zhijing's wounds reacted to his anger and he was in pain; it was difficult for him to bear and he felt like dying, but he suddenly said, "Yang Guo, is this the truth?"

Yang Guo did not know how high the sky was or how deep the earth was, he only knew that Grandma Sun was arguing with Zhao Zhijing to protect him. Even if she said he did thousands or millions of wrong things, he would have said he did them. Now it's just a matter of changing sects and it was what he had wanted. She said he had made Xiao Longnu his master. Even if he was going to take a pig or a dog his master he wouldn't delay, he said, "Rotten Taoist, scoundrel face,

dog brain, bull nose old goat, you hit me; why should I acknowledge you as my master? It's correct, I have already kowtowed and accepted Grandma Sun and Miss Long as my masters." Zhao Zhijing's temper flared up, he flew over, his hands aiming to grab his shoulders.

Grandma Sun insulted, "Scoundrel, you want to die?" Her right arm came out, aiming for Zhao Zhijing's wrist. Zhao Zhijing was Quanzhen's third generation's highest skilled fighter, when it came to martial arts he was above Yin Zhiping; although he had a serious injury, he was still able to produce a fierce attack. The two clashed, and both took two steps back.

Grandma Sun gave a 'humph' sigh, and said, "Scoundrel, you're not weak either."

Zhao Zhijing's first attack failed, and so launched a second. Grandma Sun didn't dare to clash with him and stepped aside, her leg came out of nowhere from under her skirt. Zhao Zhijing heard the wind sound, and tried to dodge but his wounds from the Jade Bee stings started to itch, he called 'ai', held his head and crouched down. Before he finished his shout he was kicked by Grandma Sun in the side of his body. Zhao Zhijing flew into the air; whilst in the air he called out 'ai' again because of the itching pain.

Yin Zhiping rushed forward two steps, stretched out his arms, caught Zhao Zhijing and passed him on to the other disciples. He saw that the ugly old woman's skills were extremely strange, he was up against a strong opponent, he made a signal, and six disciples came up and circled them, and formed a "Big Dipper Formation", with Grandma Sun and Yang Guo in the middle.

Yin Zhiping called out, "Apologies!" As the 'Tian Shu' and 'Yao Guang' Taoists on either side of him attacked. Grandma Sun didn't know the formation, after just a few stances she

knew she was dealing with something powerful. She could only fight with one hand; the danger became evident after twelve or thirteen moves. Every attack she made was neutralized by Yin Zhiping's command of the formation, and the attack of the formation was relentless. Ten moves passed then Grandma Sun's right palm was trapped by two Taoists; from her left another two Taoists attacked, she had to drop Yang Guo and fend them off with her left hand. A whistle came from within the formation; two Taoists burst forward and grabbed Yang Guo.

Grandma Sun was alarmed and thought, "Those rotten Taoists do have some skill, and this old woman here can't handle it." She kicked away two of them, and a low 'weng' moaning noise was produced from her mouth. That moaning noise was initially quiet, and the Taoists did not take any notice of it, but after this noise, she made an opposite sound, high and low, the sound became louder.

Yin Zhiping raised his hands against Grandma Sun to guard himself. He knew the senior that used to live in the tomb had great skills and had competed with his sect's founder to see whose were greater; he knew that her descendants must not be ordinary. When he heard the noise, he knew that this was a type of resonating sound skill, he quickly prepared himself in case the enemy tried anything; he listened for a while and her sounds were getting louder, he didn't feel anything was wrong with himself and thought that this was strange. He suddenly thought of something and immediately became pale with fright. He was about to order the Taoists to leave, when he heard a 'weng' noise from far away, similar to the noise coming out of Grandma Sun's mouth, and then immediately called out, "Run quickly!"

The other Taoists all stopped, and thought, "We have the upper hand here, we have captured the young and old in a

short time, the old woman is just calling out madly, what is there to be afraid of?"

Suddenly a grey blur emerged from the forest, out came a swarm of Jade Bees, all aiming to land on the Taoists' upper body. The Taoists had all seen the suffering of Zhao Zhijing, they all were frightened out of their wits, and immediately scattered and ran away. The swarm of bees chased after them.

When Grandma Sun saw that the Taoists could not escape, she laughed loudly. She suddenly saw an old Taoist dashing out of the forest, his hands holding two torches; thick smoke came out of the flames and he waved them at the swarm of bees. The black smoke smothered the bees, their formation became disorganized, and they couldn't hold together and flew away.

Grandma Sun was alarmed, she looked at the old Taoist, and she saw that he had white hair and eyebrows, his face was long and he looked like one of the highly skilled fighters of the Quanzhen sect. She shouted, "Hey, who are you old Taoist? You scattered away my bees."

The old Taoist laughed and said, "This old Taoist is Hao Datong, greetings Grandma."

Grandma Sun did not associate with any people of the Wulin world. But because she lived a stone throw away from Chongyang Palace, she knew that Hao Datong was one of the seven disciples of Wang Chongyang. She thought how Yin Zhiping, Zhao Zhijing and the other Taoists' abilities were not below hers, but now that old Taoist came and it would be troublesome. She smelled the thick smoke from the torches, it stank and almost made her vomit, and she then realized it was made from herbs that are used to kill insects. She saw that there were no bees around so she had to leave while she could, she shouted, "You've harmed my Mistress's bees, you'll

pay for the damage, I'll resolve this with you later." She picked up Yang Guo and entered the forest.

Yin Zhiping said, "Martial Uncle, shall we follow or not?"

Hao Datong shook his head and said, "Our founder had set a strict rule, no one can enter the forest, we'll return to our palace and discuss what's to be done there."

Grandma Sun held Yang Guo's hand and took him back inside the tomb. The two had just shared a difficult situation and had become closer. Yang Guo was worried that Xiao Longnu will not allow him to stay. Grandma Sun said, "Don't worry; I'll be able to convince her to let you stay." She then ordered him to rest in a chamber, and then went to look for Xiao Longnu to inform her of the situation.

Yang Guo waited a long time, but still did not see her return, he became anxious and thought, "Long Gu Gu most probably decided not to accept me, even if Grandma Sun forced her to accept, there would be no point in me staying here." He thought for a long while and eventually made up his mind, he quietly went outside.

As soon as he left the room, Grandma Sun came over and asked, "Where are you going?"

Yang Guo said, "Grandma, I'm going now, when I get a bit older, I'll come and see you again."

Grandma Sun said, "No, I'll take you to a place, and tell people not to bully you."

When Yang Guo heard those words, he knew Xiao Longnu had not allowed him to stay, he was disappointed and sad, he lowered his head and said, "There's no use. I'm a mischievous child, where ever I go, no one will want me. There's no need for Grandma to waste your energy."

Grandma Sun had argued with Xiao Longnu for half a day, she saw that she will not be moved, she was troubled and didn't know what to do. She felt sorry for Yang Guo, her blood rose and said, "Child, if no one wants you, Granny wants you. You follow me, where ever you go, Grandma will follow you."

Yang Guo was delighted, he extended his hand and grabbed her's, the two of them exited the tomb. Grandma Sun was still angry and did not turn back to collect some luggage, she scoured around in her pockets and touched a container, and remembered she had to give Zhao Zhijing the antidote for the bee stings. She thought that the Taoist was detestable but death was maybe a bit too extreme and she didn't want to leave the trouble behind in case it caught up with them. So she took Yang Guo, and headed for Chongyang Palace.

Yang Guo saw that they were hurriedly heading for Chongyang Palace, he was frightened, he quietly said, "Grandma, why are you going there?"

Grandma Sun said, "I have to give your rotten master the antidote." After a few paths, they had arrived. She leapt onto the roof, and was about to go for the courtyard, when suddenly the bell started to ring in the darkness, and she heard whistle sounds near and far. In a second noises came from everywhere, and knew that she was heavily surrounded; she became alarmed.

The Quanzhen sect is Wulin's number one orthodox sect, they were normally well guarded, but things had happened recently and so they were more alert. There were lookouts everywhere and when they saw someone enter the palace, they sounded the alarm. The palace's disciples all came to repel the foe. Another group of Taoists scattered around, one, so they surrounded the enemy, and secondly, so they can repel any reinforcements that the enemy might have brought along.

Grandma Sun quietly cursed, "This old woman here has not come to fight; who are you trying to scare?" She loudly called out, "Zhao Zhijing, quickly come out, I have something to say to you."

Someone called out from the main hall, "Coming here in the middle of the night, what do you want?"

Grandma Sun said, "This is the antidote for the bee stings, take it!" She threw over the container.

A Taoist caught it, and believed her but then thought, "Does she have good intentions in coming back to give us the antidote." He called out clearly, "What medicine is this?"

Grandma Sun said, "Don't ask so many questions, just give it to him to drink, and you'll see the results."

The Taoist called out, "How do I know whether you've come with good or bad intentions, and how do I know if this is actually medicine not poison. Apprentice brother Zhao has been tortured enough by you, when did you gain the heart of Buddha?"

Grandma Sun heard his words, her good intentions had turned into some evil intent, she was furious and put Yang Guo down on the roof, then quickly jumped in front of the Taoist and snatched the bottle back. She opened the bottle, and said to Yang Guo, "Open your mouth!"

Yang Guo didn't understand but did as he was told. She tipped the bottle and poured the bee honey into his mouth and said, "Fine, just in case you think its poison. Guo'Er lets go!" She held Yang Guo's hand and ran to the edge of the roof and jumped down.

That Taoist was called Zhang Zhiguang, and was Hao Datong's second disciple, he was cursing himself. He regretted his words when he realized that she had bought

along the real antidote, Zhao Zhijing now had no antidote and it would be difficult for him to survive, he quickly followed and blocked them with his hands. He smiled and said, "Old Senior, why are you so furious? I was just joking, there's no need to take it seriously. We are neighbors, and have seen each other a few times, ha-ha, please bestow the medicine to us."

Grandma Sun did not like his smooth talk, she stopped, and chuckled, "There is only one bottle of medicine, if you want some more, there isn't any. You can find your own way to cure Zhao Zhijing's wounds!" As she said this she sent out her hand and said, "Since you don't greet a senior, I'll teach you a lesson." The palm was extremely quick, Zhang Zhiguang couldn't avoid it, a clashing sound was heard, he was struck on the cheek, and his face was stinging.

By the door the two Taoists' faces changed and both of them said, "Even if you are a senior, how can we let you do what you want in Chongyang Palace?" One sent out his left palm, the other his right, the two of them attacking together from two sides. Grandma Sun had fought the "Big Dipper Formation" before and knew it was powerful; she knew it would be best to avoid it. If she went to attack them, how could she fight them all in their formation? She dodged past the two palms, and picked up Yang Guo and headed for the rooftops. She saw that there was no one on the roof; she wanted to escape via this route when suddenly someone jumped up on the roof and shouted, "Drop down!" sending two palms out. Grandma Sun was in midair, she had nothing to lean against, and could only fight with her right hand, one palm clashed with two, both of them were forced back, each of them on either side of the wall. Six or seven Taoists whistled, and crowded her into the corner.

These Taoists were the best fighters of Quanzhen's third generation, and had come out to protect the main hall. In a

flash, they moved back, and then rushed forward; the Taoists used a storming tactic and attacked many times. Grandma Sun was forced into the corner, and tried to break out with Yang Guo in her hand, but the Taoists formed a human wall and kept her back, she tried to break through many times but was forced back each time.

Ten moves passed. The one in charge of guarding the main hall Zhang Zhiguang knew that the enemy could not do anything and immediately lit a torch. Ten large candles were lit up all around the main hall, and shone on Grandma Sun's pale face, an ugly face of a frightful person who hides in the forest.

Zhang Zhiguang called out, "Retreat."

The seven Taoists who were attacking Grandma Sun took a step back, their hands across their chests, each holding their position. Grandma Sun caught her breath and then chuckled, "The Quanzhen sect is famous throughout the world, indeed they live up to their name. Over ten young and athletic men teamed up together to bully an old woman and a child. Ha-ha, so powerful, so powerful!"

Zhang Zhiguang's face turned a shade of red and said, "We are only trying to catch an intruder in the palace. We don't care if it's an old woman or a young man, if they were tall when they enter, they'll be short when they leave."

Grandma Sun chuckled and said, "What do you mean 'short when they leave'? You want me to crawl out of here, is that it!"

Zhang Zhiguang had just been slapped painfully by Grandma Sun, he wasn't going to let her off lightly, and said, "If you want me to let you go, it's not hard, just agree to three things. One, you called your bees to hurt brother Zhao; you have to leave the antidote. Two, that child is a student of the

Quanzhen sect, how can he expel himself from the school without the permission of our leader? You've got to leave him here. Three, you broke into Chongyang Palace, you have to kowtow in front of ancestor Chongyang to apologize."

Grandma Sun laughed loudly and said, "I have long said to Mistress Long that none of the Taoists here have a good future, aren't the old woman's words true? Come, come I'll go and kowtow."

Grandma Sun lowered herself and began to kneel down. For Zhang Zhiguang this was unexpected, he was stunned, he saw Grandma Sun lowering her head, when suddenly he saw a flash, a projectile was thrown straight at him. Zhang Zhiguang cried out 'ai ya', he had tried to move out of the way quickly but the projectile was extremely quick and hit the corner of his left eye, his forehead was full of blood.

Grandma Sun had scoured her pocket and had grabbed the empty bee honey bottle, and calmly used her sect's projectile throwing technique to send the projectile out. Her sect's kung fu was designed for females, the techniques were all soft and of a ying nature, the changes mysterious, this stance "First Bow Greet After" (qian ju hou gong) was unexpected. Though it was just an empty bottle, but because of the short distance it was shot out from, Zhang Zhiguang did not expect it and could not avoid it.

The Taoists saw that Zhang Zhiguang's head was covered with blood, they all shouted at the same time, and took out a weapon. Quanzhen's Taoists all used swords, the courtyard lit up with the blades light. Grandma Sun got up and chuckled, she knew that it would be hard for her to complete this day. But she was strong and stubborn, she wouldn't surrender, she turned her head and asked Yang Guo, "Child, are you afraid?"

When Yang Guo saw the long swords brandished, he had already thought to himself, "If Uncle Guo was here, even if there were more Taoists I wouldn't be scared. But with Grandma Sun's skills, we will not be able to break out." When he heard Grandma Sun ask him the question, he clearly replied, "Grandma, just let them kill me. This business has nothing to do with you, leave quickly."

Grandma Sun heard the child's proud resilient air, and his concern for her, and loved him even more, she loudly said, "Grandma will die with you to grant the rotten Taoists their wish." She suddenly shouted out "Now!" and dashed forward, she stretched out her arms, and caught hold of two Taoists' wrists; she twisted them and snatched their swords. Her "Empty Hands Entering a Hundred Blades" kung fu was extremely strange; it was reckless yet it was mystifying and not ordinary. The two Taoists could not defend against this, and all of a sudden they had lost their weapons.

Grandma Sun gave one of the swords to Yang Guo and said, "Child, do you dare to fight against the rotten Taoists?"

Yang Guo said, "Of course I'm not afraid. It's a pity that there are no other people here."

Grandma Sun said, "What other people?"

Yang Guo loudly said, "The Quanzhen sect is world renowned, such a heroic deed as bullying an orphan and an old woman, isn't it a pity that there's no one to spread this story?" He had heard how Grandma Sun and Zhang Zhiguang argued, and understood one of the points raised. His words were clear and simple, his voice was bright and loud.

When the Taoists heard his words, half of them felt ashamed, they thought that ganging up on a small child and an old

woman was a shameful thing to do. Someone quietly said, "I'll go and tell our leader, and hear his decision."

Right now Ma Yu was ten miles away at the far side of the mountain meditating in a small room; the sect's affairs were handed to Hao Datong. The Taoist who said this was a disciple of Tan Chuduan, he felt that the situation has got out of hand and now the sect's reputation was on the line. This matter had to be dealt by their sect's leader personally.

Zhang Zhiguang's face was struck by the empty jar and his left eye was covered in blood; he was furious and acted out on impulse. He knew that their sect leader was peaceful and he would order them to release Yang Guo and Grandma Sun. He will have suffered for no reason. He called out loudly; "First we'll catch that evil witch, then we'll let leader decide what to do. Everyone, catch them."

The "Big Dipper Formation" gradually shrank back; they saw that she only had one hand to fight with but who would guess that when the seven of them rushed to within three paces of her, her sword swirled, and defended tightly; they couldn't advance another step. The formation was led by Zhang Zhiguang, and needed a change of direction, but he was afraid that the projectile that struck him had poison on it. If he fought then the poison would spread faster, he closed his left eye and stood to the side controlling the formation. Since he had decided not to fight, the formation's power weakened. The Taoists fought for a long time but couldn't make any progress and began to get impatient. Suddenly Grandma Sun gave a shout and flung her long sword away, she dashed forward three steps and dodged pass the Taoists' swords, and grabbed a young Taoist's chest and picked him up, she shouted, "Scoundrels, will or will you not let us pass?" The Taoists stopped, but suddenly a body flew out from behind them, stretched out their arm and attacked Grandma Sun's wrist. Grandma Sun did not see that person's

face clearly; she felt a numbing sensation in her wrist and the young Taoist she had in her hands was taken by him. She felt a strong wind coming towards her, the person was sending out a palm to attack her. Grandma Sun thought, "That person's palm is extremely fast." She quickly pushed out her own palms to repel the attack. The two palms met and made a clashing sound, and Grandma Sun took a step back. The person also took a slight step back, about an inch or so, then immediately followed with a second palm without a pause. Grandma Sun also sent out her palms to attack, and was forced back another step. The person took half a step forward and sent out a third palm. The three palms sent out were faster than the last, and forced Grandma Sun back three steps, she didn't have a chance to see who her opponent was, by the fourth palm, Grandma Sun's back was forced up against the wall; she had nowhere to retreat. The person sent out a right palm, and locked palms with Grandma Sun, and he calmly said, "Grandma, leave the antidote and the child here!"

Grandma Sun raised her head, and saw that the person had a head full of white hair and white eyebrows, his face was purple, it was the man who had earlier used poison smoke to fend off her bees, Hao Datong. After the first three palms, she knew that his internal energy was profound, and above hers, if he increased his palm's power, she would not be able to hold on, but she was strong and stubborn, she would rather die than give in, she shouted, "If you want me to leave the child, first you have to kill me."

Hao Datong knew their sect and his teacher had a deep history and didn't wish to harm her, he held back on his palm, and said, "We have been neighbors for over ten years, why risk our friendship over a small child."

Grandma Sun chuckled, and said, "I originally came here to give you the antidote, so ask your disciples, what this is all

about.”

Hao Datong turned his head around to ask his disciples when suddenly Grandma Sun sent out a kick, aiming for his legs. That kick came out of nowhere, her body or skirt didn't move, the opponent's leg was coming into his stomach, there wasn't time to move back, under this threat he reacted, and channeled more strength into his palm, a 'hey' sound was heard as Grandma Sun was pushed backwards. His push contained all the internal energy he has cultivated over the years using Quanzhen's advanced internal energy cultivation techniques. He heard a thudding sound as dust from the upper part of the wall fell down. Grandma Sun spat out a pool of blood, and slowly dropped down onto the floor.

Yang Guo was shocked, and hugged her body and said, “If you want to kill someone, kill me. There is no need to harm Grandma.”

Grandma Sun opened her eyes and chuckled and said, “Child, looks like we are going to die in the same place.”

Yang Guo loosened his arms, and guarded her, his back to Hao Datong and the others, he ignored his own safety. Hao Datong's palm was serious, he saw that his opponent was injured and was very regretful about his attack. He wanted to go over and take a closer look at Grandma Sun's injury, and give her medicine to heal the wound, but Yang Guo blocked his way and he couldn't get close. He softly said, “Yang Guo, move out of the way, let me take a closer look at Grandma.”

Yang Guo didn't believe him and held Grandma Sun tightly. Hao Datong tried to persuade him a few times but saw that Yang Guo was ignoring him; he became impatient and stretched out his arm to pull him away. Yang Guo loudly shouted, “Rotten Taoists, scoundrels, you can kill me, I won't let you harm Grandma.”

Just as he was saying he won't surrender Grandma Sun, a cold voice from behind suddenly said, "Bullying a child and an old woman, how heroic is that?"

Hao Datong heard the cold and icy voice, his heart shivered. He turned around to take a look and saw an extremely beautiful young girl standing at the entrance to the main hall. Her clothes were as white as snow, and her eyes froze those who looked at her. Once the palace's bell rang, within ten li, the area would be tightly guarded. Yet the girl managed to enter without alerting anyone. No one knew how she managed to enter without making a sound.

Hao Datong asked, "Miss, who are you? What do you want?"

The young girl glanced at him and didn't reply, and went over to Grandma Sun. Yang Guo raised his head and mournfully said. "Long Gu Gu this evil Taoists killed Grandma!" The girl in white was Xiao Longnu. She had witnessed everything clearly from Grandma Sun leaving the tomb with Yang Guo, going to the palace, and Grandma Sun fighting. If Hao Datong had not used such a lethal move, she would not have shown herself, but now Grandma Sun had suffered a serious injury. Had she wanted to come and help it was now too late. She had seen with her own eyes how Yang Guo had disregarded his life to protect Grandma Sun; his eyes were full of tears. She nodded and said, "Everyone dies, there is nothing special about death."

Grandma Sun had brought her up by herself and treated her like a daughter; but Xiao Longnu had lived in a detached state for these eighteen years, and cultivated the sect's internal energy; she didn't have a touch of grief or anger in her. She saw that Grandma Sun was beyond help and so there was no need to feel sorrow. However, for a split second, she felt grief for a loved one, but no emotion was shown on her face. Hao Datong heard Yang Guo had called her 'Long

Gu Gu', and knew that it was the Xiao Longnu who had chased Prince Huo Dou away, and he was surprised. The news of how Huo Dou had been forced to run away had spread throughout the world of Jianghu. Though Xiao Longnu had never taken a step away from Mount Zhongnan, her name was now known throughout the Wulin world.

Xiao Longnu turned her head around slowly, and looked at the Taoists. Hao Datong's internal energy was deep and he was able to keep a still body and mind. When the other Taoists saw her clearly, and looked into her frosty and captivating eyes, they could not stop their hearts from trembling.

Xiao Longnu stooped down to take a closer look at Grandma Sun and asked, "Grandma Sun, how are you?"

Grandma Sun sighed and said, "Miss, I have never requested anything from you in my entire life, I beg you, will you allow me a request or won't you."

Xiao Longnu wrinkled her elegant brows slightly and said, "What do you want me to do?"

Grandma Sun nodded her head, and pointed to Yang Guo, she wasn't able to speak for the time being.

Xiao Longnu said, "You want me to take care of him?"

Grandma Sun forced a deep breath and said, "I beg you to look after him forever, don't let others harm him, can you promise me that?"

Xiao Longnu hesitantly said, "Look after him forever?"

Grandma Sun sternly said, "Miss, if this old woman doesn't die, I will look after you forever. Who clothed you, fed you and changed you when you were little, wasn't it all done by this old woman? How...how...how have you repaid me?"

Xiao Longnu bit her lip and said, "Alright, I promise."

A smile crept upon Grandma Sun's face. Her eyes looked at Yang Guo; she wanted to say something but couldn't catch her breath. Yang Guo knew what she wanted and lowered his ear to her mouth and quietly said, "Grandma, you want to say something to me?"

Grandma Sun said, "Lower your head a bit more."

Yang Guo lowered himself further, and placed his ear right by her mouth.

Grandma Sun whispered, "Your Auntie Long has no one to depend on, you...you..." when she got up to this point she couldn't say anything more. She suddenly spat out a mouthful of blood, Yang Guo's face and clothes were speckled with blood, her eyes closed and she passed away.

Yang Guo shouted, "Grandma, Grandma!" He was grief stricken; he held her body and sobbed.

The Taoists who saw this felt a touch of sorrow, and Hao Datong was even more regretful, he went up to Grandma Sun and paid his respects and said, "Grandma, I didn't mean to hurt you. This sin that has come upon me is ruled by your fate. Grandma, go peacefully!"

Xiao Longnu stood up, but didn't say anything and waited for him to finish. The two of them stared at each other. Half an hour passed then Xiao Longnu frowned again and said, "What? You are not going to kill yourself to repay your debt; you want me to do it for you?"

Hao Datong was startled and said, "What?"

Xiao Longnu said, "You killed someone so you need to pay the life back, kill yourself and finish this and I'll spare the lives of all the Taoists here."

Before Hao Datong could reply, the Taoists that were around him spoke out. There were about thirty or forty Taoists here in the main hall, all saying; “Little girl, leave quickly now and we won’t make it hard for you.”

“What crap! Kill yourself and finish this, and you’ll spare our lives” “This young girl does not know how high the sky is or how deep the earth is.” When Hao Datong heard the Taoists clamor he quickly waved his hand to tell them to be quiet.

Xiao Longnu ignored all the Taoists’ comments, and slowly took out a silk object from her pocket, the object was a glove and she slipped it on her right hand. She separated her hands, with her right she placed a silk belt into her left hand and she quietly said, “Old Taoist, you are a coward, you are afraid of killing yourself, take out a weapon and get ready to fight!”

Hao Datong smiled and said, “This old man hurt Grandma Sun by accident, I don’t want to fight with you, take Yang Guo and leave this place.” He thought that although she has become famous for forcing Huo Dou to run away, she just relied on the threat of her Jade Bees. She is of a young age, even if her skills have their fine points, she would not be any better than Grandma Sun. So he decided to let her leave; firstly because of their sect’s first generation’s relationship, secondly he was troubled by accidentally killing Grandma Sun; it was for the best.

He didn’t guess that Xiao Longnu would not take any notice of his words, her left arm raised, a strip of silk suddenly flew out from the floor, heading straight for Hao Datong’s face. That move came without making a noise and out of nowhere, there was no warning. Under the candlelight, he saw a gold coloured sphere tied to the silk belt. Hao Datong saw that she unleashed her move extremely quickly, and the weapon she used was extremely strange, and was uncertain on how to

react. He was old and the years had made him more prudent; although he had faced many skilled fighters before, he didn't dare to receive the attack head on and moved to the left.

He didn't know that Xiao Longnu's belt could change direction in midair. Hao Datong leaped to the left, the belt followed him to the left, three sounds were heard as the gold sphere shook three times, and hit his face's 'Meeting Fragrance' (Ying Xiang), 'Receiving Tears' (Cheng Qi) and 'Central' (Ren Zhong) three pressure points. The moves used to hit the pressure points were extremely fast, nothing more could be done during this time. It was one of the best skills in the Wulin world. He heard the gold sphere rattle two times, and although it wasn't loud it was extremely strange. As it entered the ear it moved the heart and shook the soul. Hao Datong was alarmed and quickly used the "Metal Board Bridge" (tie ban qiao), his body moved backwards; the silk belt swept swiftly inches away from his face. He was afraid of the gold sphere pursuing and attacking him. His kung fu was refined, and as he was stepping back he suddenly leaped up three meters. Xiao Longnu didn't predict this; a 'zheng' sound was made as the sphere hit the floor. Her pressure point hitting technique with the sphere was all linked and continuous, but in the midst of danger, Hao Datong managed to luckily escape. Hao Datong straightened his body, his face changed colour. The surrounding Taoists were either his disciples or were his martial nephews and they all respected his skills. Though he wasn't harmed, they were astonished at the way he scampered out of the last attack. Four Taoists raised their swords and aimed for Xiao Longnu.

Xiao Longnu said, "Yes, you should have used your weapons long ago!"

She waved her hands, two silk belts moved out like snakes, two 'ting' sounds were heard, the 'Spirit Channel' (ling dao) pressure points on their wrists were struck, and the four

swords struck the floor. The Taoists' faces changed color, none of them dared to attack again after that move.

Hao Datong had initially thought Xiao Longnu's skills were ordinary, but didn't think that he would almost lose to her. His dislike for the enemy increased and he took a long sword out of the hands of one of the disciples, and said, "Miss Long's skills are excellent, this old Taoist applauds, come, come, let the old Taoist test some of Miss Long's advanced skills."

Xiao Longnu nodded her head, two 'ting' sounds were heard, the two belts swept in from the left and right.

According to seniority, Hao Datong was one level above Xiao Longnu and out of respect for dueling with a senior, Xiao Longnu should hold back on the first three moves. But her stances were full of killer intent immediately, and ignored any rules of the Wulin world.

Hao Datong thought, "Although the girl's skills are not weak, she doesn't seem to understand rules. She hasn't had much battle experience; I doubt that she can show much more ability in this battle." His left hand followed the sword as his right hand held it, and he fought against the white silk belts.

The Taoists all circled around and watched the battle closely. Under the flickering candlelight, one could only see a girl dressed in white, an old Taoist in grey. The belts looked like rainbows and the sword moved like lightning as they engaged in battle.

Hao Datong had put sweat and blood into training his sword skills. When it came to sword skills, his were ranked third or fourth. But Xiao Longnu flipped and rolled and avoided many of his stances, he wasn't able to gain any advantage. Xiao Longnu's silk belts were like sinuous snakes circling around,

and the two gold spheres continuously sent out 'ting' sounds which was even more disturbing for the opponent.

Hao Datong had fought for a long while without gaining the upper hand. Although he wasn't losing, it was slightly embarrassing. He thought about how he was well known as a skilled fighter in the world of Wulin, yet he had fought over one hundred stances with the young girl but still was unable to gain any advantage. He became impatient and changed his sword style, fast became slow, though his stances became much slower than before, the force behind the sword increased many times over. At first he was only able to avoid his sword tip being trapped by the silk belts; now the sword strength increased, he was able to cut and chop the belts.

More stances passed when suddenly a clashing sound was heard as the sword tip clashed with a golden sphere. Hao Datong's internal energy was profound and he knocked the golden sphere out of the way, hitting it towards Xiao Longnu. He then attacked forward. The Taoists saw the sword pass the advance of a silk belt, heading for Xiao Longnu's wrist. They thought that she had to let go of the silk belt otherwise her wrist would be pierced.

Who would have guessed that Xiao Longnu's right hand turned over and caught the blade of the sword; a 'ka' sound was heard as the sword snapped in half.

The Taoists all gasped in surprise. Hao Datong quickly jumped backwards, his hand holding the snapped sword, and was left standing in shock. He didn't know that the opponent's glove was made out of an extremely fine and extremely tough white gold thread; it was a unique weapon that was passed down by her ancestors. Although it was fine and light, no blade or spear could pierce it; not even precious knives or sharp swords could damage it. She had held the sword's blade and used her strength to break it.

Hao Datong was pale; he had just suffered a great defeat. He didn't realize that there was something special about her glove and thought that she had mastered the advanced skills of being impenetrable by swords and spears. His voice quavered as he said, "Good, good, good, this old Taoist admits defeat. Miss Long, take the child and leave."

Xiao Longnu said, "You've killed Grandma Sun; now just a word admitting defeat and that's it?"

Hao Datong laughed out at the sky and said, "I'm really stupid!" He raised his broken sword and aimed for his neck.

A sudden noise was heard, his hand shook severely; a coin had come from beyond the walls, and knocked the sword out of his hand onto the floor. His energy was profound, how easy could it be for someone to knock the sword out of his hand?

Hao Datong shivered, from the ability to use a coin to knock the sword out of his hand, he knew his martial brother Qiu Chuji had arrived. He raised his head and said, "Martial Brother Qiu, little brother is useless." He heard a long laugh coming from outside the walls, followed by, "Winning and losing are normal; if those who lost cut their throats then even if your Martial Brother had eighteen necks they all would have been cut long ago."

Qiu Chuji leaped over the wall and into the scene, his hand holding a long sword. He was a very straightforward man, he hated unnecessary talk, and stretched out his sword, pointing it at Xiao Longnu's arm and said, "Quanzhen's Qiu Chuji wishes to test our neighbor's great skill."

Xiao Longnu said, "You are very straightforward." She stretched out her left palm and held Qiu Chuji's sword.

Hao Datong quickly warned, "Apprentice brother, careful!" But he was too late, Xiao Longnu exerted her energy, and Qiu

Chuji channeled his energy into his sword. The two of them competed; a 'ka' sound and the sword broke in half. But Xiao Longnu's arm was shaken and was slightly numb; she felt a pain in her chest. Within this stance, she knew that Qiu Chuji's ability was well above Hao Datong's. She herself has not finished studying the "Jade Heart Manual", and she would not be able to beat him. She threw the broken blade onto the floor. Her left hand lifted the body of Grandma Sun, her right hand Yang Guo; then she leapt up and soared into the air, flying away gracefully from the top of the wall.

Qiu Chuji, Hao Datong and the others saw her demonstrate her lightness kung fu and they looked on in astonishment. Qiu Chuji and Hao Datong had fought with her; they knew that she was blessed with refined skills. But her martial arts level was still significantly weaker than theirs; however they had never seen such an admirable display of lightness kung fu.

Hao Datong sighed, and said, "It's finished, it's finished!"

Qiu Chuji said, "Apprentice brother, you have studied Taoism for many years, how could it be that you are not able to see past a small mistake? Our brothers and sister in Shanxi, didn't we have another set of problems?"

Hao Datong was alarmed and said, "What? Was anyone hurt?"

Qiu Chuji said, "It's a long story, we'll go and see apprentice brother Ma first."

After Li Mochou killed the Lu family she traveled to Shanxi, in Jinbei she killed a few more heroes of the Wulin world. She eventually provoked public indignation; the leaders of the Wulin world in that area sent our heroes invitations, inviting them to attack her. The Quanzhen sect was the receiver of one of these hero invitations. At that time, Ma Yu and Qiu

Chuji discussed how Li Mochou has done many evil deeds, and though her sect and theirs had a long history, it would be best if they solved it and give her a chance to turn over a new leaf. Liu Chuxuan and Sun Bu'Er were at Meibei. However Li Mochou hid her tracks, and traveled around discreetly, Liu Chuxuan and Sun Bu'Er couldn't stop her and she hurt some more good men of Jinnan and Jinbei. Eventually Qiu Chuji and Wang Chuyi brought with them ten disciples, and rendezvoused with Liu Chuxuan and Sun Bu'Er. Li Mochou knew that it would be difficult for one person to fight off so many good fighters, and so she agreed with Qiu and Wang to a duel. The first day's duel was with Sun Bu'Er. Li Mochou secretly used her 'Soul Freezing Silver Needles' and pierced her. She immediately went up to them and gave them the antidote, and told Qiu Chuji they must accept it. This meant that they accepted a favour from her. According to the rules of Jianghu; they wouldn't be able to chase after and fight her. The Taoists could only laugh bitterly as they made their way back. It was lucky that Qiu Chuji hurried back by himself, not traveling with the group, and managed to arrive in time to save Hao Datong's life.

After Xiao Longnu left Chongyang Palace, she put Yang Guo down and carried Grandma Sun's body back to the Tomb of the Living Dead. She put her body on the bed that she normally slept on, and sat down on the chair in front of the bed and didn't speak a single word. Yang Guo threw himself on Grandma Sun's body and cried incessantly. After a while Xiao Longnu said, "She's already dead, why are you crying? Even if you cried some more, she wouldn't know about it."

Yang Guo was startled, and felt that her words were cold and emotionless, but when he thought about it her words made sense; then he was struck with grief once more and burst out crying again.

Xiao Longnu looked at him coldly, her expression remained the same, after another while she said, "We are going to bury her, follow me."

She picked up the body and exited the room. Yang Guo wiped away his tears with his sleeve and followed her. The tomb's passageways were pitch black, he opened his eyes wide but could only see the ghostly white image of Xiao Longnu, he could only follow closely, he didn't dare to lose track of her.

She twisted east and winded west, after half an hour, she pushed open a heavy stone door and from her pockets she took a match and lit two oil lamps on a stone table. Yang Guo took a look around and shivered, he saw a large empty room with five stone coffins. He took a closer look and saw that two of them were tightly closed, the other three were half open, and he didn't know if there were corpses inside.

Xiao Longnu pointed to the first coffin on the right and said, "Ancestor Grandma lies there." She pointed to the second one and said, "Master lies there."

Yang Guo saw her pointing to a third coffin, his heart jumped, he didn't know who she was going to say lies in that one. The lid was not closed; if there was a corpse inside wouldn't it be extremely putrid? He heard her say, "Grandma Sun will lie in that one."

Yang Guo knew it was an empty coffin, and let out his breath. He saw the other two coffins and became curious, he asked, "What about those two coffins?"

Xiao Longnu said, "One is for my apprentice sister Li Mochou, the other is for me."

Yang Guo froze and said, "Li Mochou! Miss Li is going to return?"

Xiao Longnu replied, "My teacher planned it all, she will return. There is one coffin short because my master didn't plan for you."

Yang Guo was shocked and quickly said, "I don't want one...I don't want one!"

Xiao Longnu said, "I promised Grandma Sun that I was going to look after you forever. Since I won't leave, then that means you won't either."

Yang Guo heard her talk about his life and death; he lost any sense of concern and said, "Even if you don't let me go, when you die, I'll be able to leave."

Xiao Longnu said, "I promised to look after you forever, I won't die before you."

Yang Guo said, "Why not? You are older than me!"

Xiao Longnu calmly said, "Before I die, I will kill you."

Yang Guo's heart jumped into his throat, and thought, "Maybe not. People have got legs, won't I run away?"

Xiao Longnu went up to the third coffin and opened the lid, she then picked up Grandma Sun and placed her inside. Yang Guo didn't want to abandon her just yet and said, "Let me take another look at Grandma." Xiao Longnu knew they had just known each other for a over a day yet they managed to become so closely bonded, she agreed to his request. She frowned and picked up the corpse of Grandma Sun unmoved. Yang Guo looked at Grandma Sun under the dim light, and wanted to cry again. Xiao Longnu looked at him, then placed Grandma Sun's body into the coffin; she pulled the lid over, a click sound, and the lid locked into place tightly sealing the coffin.

Xiao Longnu was afraid that Yang Guo would cry again and said, "Let's leave!" She waved her left sleeve, the two oil lamps in the room were put out, and the room was plunged into darkness. Yang Guo was afraid that she would trap him in there and quickly ran out.

In the tomb, there is no difference between night and day. The two of them had a long day and were tired. Xiao Longnu ordered Yang Guo to sleep in Grandma Sun's room. Yang Guo had wandered around Jianghu by himself since he was very young; he would normally sleep rough or in old temples, and was brave. But now, sleeping by himself in this room, he began to think about the dead people in the coffins and was frightened out of his wits. Xiao Longnu said a few words but he did not reply.

Xiao Longnu said, "Did you not hear me?"

Yang Guo said, "I'm scared"

Xia Long Nu asked, "Scared of what?"

Yang Guo replied, "I don't know. I'm afraid to sleep by myself."

Xia Long Nu frowned and said, "You can sleep with me in my room." She then led him to her room. She was used to the darkness and would not usually light a candle, but because of Yang Guo she lit a wax candle. Yang Guo saw that she was beautiful, the clothes she wore were as white as snow, with not a speck of dust, and he thought that her room must be very elegant and refined. When he entered however, he was disappointed; he saw that her room was empty and was like the room with the coffins. There was a blue green stone bed with a cover of long grass, a white cloth for use as a blanket, and apart from these objects there were nothing else in the room.

Yang Guo thought, "Where am I going to sleep? I'm afraid that she wants me to sleep on the floor." Then Xiao Longnu said, "Sleep on my bed!"

Yang Guo said, "That's not right. I'll sleep on the floor."

Xiao Longnu's face changed and said, "If you want to stay here then you have got to do as I say. If you want to fight with the Taoists of Quanzhen, it's up to you. If you argue with me, I'll immediately punish you with death."

Yang Guo said, "If you say you won't use that terrible punishment, then I'll listen to you."

Xiao Longnu said, "You dare to talk back?"

Yang Guo saw that she was young and beautiful, but she was strict and domineering, he stuck out his tongue and didn't say a word.

Xiao Longnu saw and said, "Why are you sticking out your tongue? You refuse to obey is that it?"

Yang Guo didn't say anything, he took off his shoes and climbed onto the bed and went to sleep. He slept on the bed a while and then awoke as he felt his bones chilled, he was alarmed and quickly jumped off the bed. Xiao Longnu saw that he was frightened out of his wits and sympathized with him, but there was a slight smile on her face as she said, "What is it?"

Yang Guo saw that smile on her face, he smiled and said, "There's something strange with that bed; you wanted to make a fool out of me."

Xiao Longnu became serious again and said, "Who's making a fool out of you? The bed is like that, quickly, go to sleep." As she said this she took out a broom from behind the door

and said, "If you get off the bed again, you will get ten whacks with this broom."

Yang Guo saw that she was serious, and could only climb onto the bed again, but this time he was prepared and wasn't shocked. It was as if there was a block of ice underneath the layer of long grass; the longer he slept the colder he became, his body shivered and his teeth chattered noisily. After a while, the coldness went into his bones, he couldn't endure anymore and got off the bed again.

He turned around and saw Xiao Longnu looking at him; her face seemed to smile but didn't smile. She had a punishment in mind for him, he secretly cursed himself in his heart and he clenched his teeth tightly and used all his strength to resist the coldness of the bed. He saw Xiao Longnu take out a rope, and tie one end to a hook on the eastern side of the room, and tied the other end to a hook on the western side of the room. The rope was off the floor at a height similar to that of a person. She lightly jumped up and lay along the rope, using it as a bed. She waved her left palm and the wind of the palm blew out the candle.

Yang Guo was in awe and said, "Gu Gu, could you teach me this skill tomorrow?"

Xiao Longnu said, "This skill is nothing. Practice hard, I have many great skills to teach you."

When Yang Guo heard that Xiao Longnu was going to sincerely teach him martial arts, he then immediately wiped away his initial feelings about her. He was grateful and tears were forming in his eyes, and said, "Gu Gu, you treat me very well, before I hated you."

Xiao Longnu said, "I forced you out of the tomb, of course you would hate me, what is so strange about that?"

Yang Guo said, "I thought you were going to be like my previous master, teaching me useless kung fu."

Xiao Longnu heard him shiver as he talked and said, "Are you cold?"

Yang Guo said, "Yes, there's something strange underneath this bed, why is it so cold?"

Xiao Longnu said, "Do you like it or don't you?"

Yang Guo said, "I...I don't."

Xiao Longnu chuckled and said, "You don't like it, yet there are many skilled fighters on this earth who wish they could have the chance to sleep on this bed."

Yang Guo asked, "You aren't punishing me?"

Xiao Longnu said, "I treat you well, and you think I'm punishing you, you really don't know what's good for you."

From her tone, it seemed as she was saying that sleeping on this bed was a blessing, so he softly asked, "Gu Gu, what is so good about this cold bed, can you explain it to me?"

Xiao Longnu said, "If you sleep on this bed for the rest of your life, you'll find out the benefits for yourself. Close your eyes, don't speak anymore."

In the darkness he heard her clothes rustle lightly, it seemed like she was turning over; she was sleeping on a rope in midair, yet was able to turn over when she wanted to. It was uncanny.

Her last two sentences were said with a strict tone, Yang Guo didn't dare to question any further. He closed his eyes to sleep, but the coldness from below advanced on him; then he thought about Grandma Sun and he was depressed again, how could he sleep? After a while he quietly called out, "Gu

Gu, I can't stand it." He heard Xiao Longnu's slow breathing; she was asleep. He quietly called out twice, but there was no reply and he thought, "If I get off the bed and sleep on the floor, she wouldn't know." He then quietly sneaked down from the bed, and stood on the floor, not daring to breathe out.

As soon as his feet touched the floor, a 'se' sound was made as Xiao Longnu leapt down from the rope, and bent his left arm behind his back, and forced him onto the floor. Yang Guo shouted in shock. Xiao Longnu grabbed the broom, and hit his backside with force. Yang Guo knew there was no use in pleading so he clenched his teeth and took the blows. The first five were very painful, but by the sixth hit Xiao Longnu held back a little, and by the last two hits she was afraid that he won't be able to endure it anymore and they were even lighter. After the ten blows, she put Yang Guo on the bed and said, "If you get off the bed again, I'll hit you again."

Yang Guo lay on the bed, and didn't make a noise; he heard her place the broom in the corner and then leaped back onto the rope. Xiao Longnu thought that he would definitely cry, but didn't think that he wouldn't make a sound. She was surprised and asked, "Why aren't you making any noise?"

Yang Guo said, "What is there to cry about, you said you were going to beat me, you beat me, even if I begged it wouldn't be of any use."

Xiao Longnu said, "Humph, you are cursing me secretly in your heart."

Yang Guo said, "I am not cursing you secretly in my heart, you are much better than my previous master."

Xiao Longnu asked, "Why?"

Yang Guo said, "Although you hit me, you cared for my well being. The hits became lighter, you were afraid that I would be in pain."

Xiao Longnu blushed slightly when she heard those words, it was lucky that it was dark and Yang Guo didn't see her, she scolded, "Humph, who cares for you, the next time you are disobedient I'll beat you even harder."

Yang Guo heard her gentle tone and smiled and said, "If you beat me harder, I'll like it even more."

Xiao Longnu spat out, "Little rascal, I'm afraid you won't be able to sleep each day without a beating."

Yang Guo said, "It depends on who beats me. If it was someone who cared about me, then I won't be angry, I'll be pleased instead. If it were someone who hates me, insults me one word, when I grow up, I'll take my revenge on them."

Xiao Longnu said, "Listen to your words; who's going to hate you and who's going to love you."

Yang Guo said, "This is all clear in my mind. There is no need to mention those who hate me; there are countless people. The people who love me are my deceased mother, Uncle Guo, my Godfather, Grandma Sun and you."

Xiao Longnu chuckled and said, "Humph, I won't love you. Grandma Sun told me to take care of you; I will take care of you. There is no point in hoping that I will treat you well."

Yang Guo was feeling cold already, but when he heard those words it was like someone had poured a bucket of cold water over him. He asked, "What's wrong with me? Why do you hate me?"

Xiao Longnu said, "Whether you are feeling good or bad, what is that to do with me? And I don't hate you. I have lived

in this tomb all my life, I don't love anything, and I don't hate anything."

Yang Guo said, "Is there anything fun around here? Gu Gu, have you ever been outside?"

Xiao Longnu said, "I have never left Mount Zhongnan, there's just trees and mountains, the sun and moon outside, what is so good about that?"

Yang Guo clapped his hand and said, "Ah, then you haven't lived properly. There are many colorful and interesting objects in the city, you should see them." Then he described all the things he had seen in his life. He was a good speaker, he added his own colorful descriptions and the objects he was describing sounded even more interesting and strange, he described hundreds of things. It was fortunate that Xiao Longnu had lived in the tomb for the past eighteen years; she didn't question his descriptions and believed them all, after he had finished, and she gave out a sigh.

Yang Guo said, "Gu Gu, I'll take you out to play, how about that?"

Xiao Longnu said, "Don't say such things! Ancestor Grandma passed down a rule; those who have lived in the Tomb of the Living Dead must not leave Mount Zhongnan one step."

Yang Guo was shocked, and thought, "Peach Blossom Island is an island in the middle of the sea, I went there and was able to leave, how can this large tomb keep me here?" and he asked, "Miss Li Mochou is your apprentice sister, she lived in the Tomb of the Living Dead, how did she leave Mount Zhongnan?"

Xiao Longnu said, "She didn't obey my Master, it was my Master who sent her out of the tomb."

Yang Guo was pleased and thought, "If there is such a rule, when I want to leave all I've got to do is disobey you and you will send me out of the tomb." He thought how he mustn't let this slip otherwise his plan wouldn't work.

The two of them talked, just for a moment, Yang Guo forgot all about the cold, but after a while his body started to shiver and shake. he then pleaded with Xiao Longnu, "Gu Gu, spare me please. I don't want to sleep on this bed."

Xiao Longnu said, "When you were fighting with your master in the Quanzhen sect, you didn't say a word about mercy, why are you like this now?"

Yang Guo laughed and said, "Those who ill treat me, even if they beat me I won't say a word. Those who treat me well, I'll be willing to die for them, what's a word of mercy compared to that?"

Xiao Longnu gave a 'humph' and said, "Little rogue, who's going to treat you well?"

Xiao Longnu was brought up by her teacher and Grandma Sun, and for these last eighteen years they were her only company. The two of them treated her well but because her Master wanted her to learn the "Jade Heart Manual" so, ever since she was small, she was told to purge her emotions. When she cried or smiled she would be punished heavily. Grandma Sun was a warm person but she didn't dare to disturb her refinement of the skill, and so Xiao Longnu became a cold, unfeeling, lonely girl. Now Yang Guo came. He was a young hot-blooded, emotional person, and the way he spoke was completely the opposite of Grandma Sun and her Master. Xiao Longnu heard him speak; she was aware that something was strange but she listened to him talking and forgot about their tiredness. When she first agreed to take in Yang Guo, it was at the request of Grandma Sun. Later

on when she heard Yang Guo say that she treats him well, she felt that she indeed did treat him well.

Yang Guo heard her tone had no more strictness within it, he said loudly, "Its cold...its cold, Gu Gu, I can't endure it anymore." Indeed he was cold, but it wasn't anything too serious.

Xiao Longnu said, "There's no need to be noisy, I'll tell you about the bed."

Yang Guo was pleased and said, "Great, I won't call out anymore, please tell Gu Gu."

Xiao Longnu said, "I said that there are many fighters who wished that they had the chance to sleep on this bed, that wasn't a lie. The bed is made out of an ancient Chilled Jade; it aids those who practice advanced types of internal energy."

Yang Guo asked, "Isn't it just a stone?"

Xiao Longnu chuckled and said, "You've said that you have seen countless strange and wondrous objects, haven't you ever seen an icy cold piece of rock before? It was Ancestor Grandma who spent seven years of blood and sweat in the extreme cold of the northern plains to dig out the Chilled Jade from under thousands of feet of ice and snow. If you practice your internal energy on this bed, one year is equivalent of ten years of normal practicing."

Yang Guo was surprised and said, "Oh, so it has such benefits."

Xiao Longnu said, "When you first sleep on it, it is extremely cold and hard to endure. Only by circulating your chi to oppose it and slowly getting used to it, you'll be able to practice your internal energy in your sleep. A normal person who practices internal energy, even the most energetic, will

have to spend a few hours each day in sleep. You have to be aware that practicing internal energy is opposing the natural flow of things, chi and blood intermix; it is completely different to what happens normally. But each night when you sleep, the chi that is produced in your sleep does not waste the energy you have accumulated in the day, it enhances your internal energy.”

Yang Guo understood and said, “If you sleep on ice and snow at night, then you will have the same effect.”

Xiao Longnu said, “Not so. Firstly, when you sleep on ice or snow, your body’s heat will eventually melt the snow and ice into water; secondly, the Chilled Jade is much colder than ice and snow. When you are refining internal energy, the most important thing to avoid is fire deviation; when you are practicing normally, half of your refined energy clashes with the fire in your heart. The Chilled Jade Bed is the world’s most yin and cold object. When sitting on the bed and refining your internal energy, the fire in your heart is cooled and neutralized. That means you will be able to press on further when cultivating your internal energy; how can that not be faster than practicing internal energy normally?”

Yang Guo was delighted, and said, “Gu Gu, you treat me very well, you lend the bed for me to sleep on, that means I won’t be scared of the Wu brothers and Guo Fu. Although Zhao Zhijing and the rest of the Taoists have practiced martial arts for so long, I still will be able to catch up with them.”

Xiao Longnu calmly said, “One of the decrees that Ancestor Grandma passed down was that once you have lived in the tomb, you must forget your struggles with other people.”

Yang Guo quickly said, “Even though they bullied me and killed Grandma Sun, we will just leave it just like that.”

Xiao Longnu said, "Everyone will die. Even if Grandma Sun did not die at the hands of Hao Datong, in a few years she would die of old age. Live a few more years or live a few less years, what difference does it make? Don't mention anything about revenge to me again."

Yang Guo felt that, although her words made sense, he could not let go; but he wasn't able to think of a reply to what she said. Then, the coolness of the bed entered his body again, he shook continuously.

Xiao Longnu said, "I'll teach you a method to oppose the coolness of the bed."

She then passed on the formulae and the way to practice internal energy to him; it was their sect's foundation kung fu. Yang Guo practiced according to the instructions. He had only practiced it for a while when he felt the coolness retreating; by the third repetition, his body felt like it was on fire. He didn't feel the bed's coolness, and instead felt that sitting on the bed was extremely comfortable, his eyes closed, and slowly he fell asleep. He slept for half an hour; his hot chi disappeared, and was wakened by the bed's coolness. He then repeated the method again. He spent the night this way, falling asleep and waking up again, but when he suddenly woke up he didn't feel any tiredness. In just a night, his internal energy level increased further.

The two of them ate breakfast, and then Yang Guo took the bowls and chopsticks into the kitchen and washed them, before returning to the main hall.

Xiao Longnu said, "There is one thing you must understand. If you really want me to be your master, you must obey me for eternity. If you don't want me to be your master, I will still teach you martial arts. If in the future you become better than me, then you can leave the tomb because of your skills."

Yang Guo replied without considering, "I am willing to take you as my master. Even if you don't teach me a drop of martial arts, I will still do as you say."

Xiao Longnu asked, "Why?"

Yang Guo said, "Gu Gu, don't you think I know that you care for me?"

Xiao Longnu made a face and said, "Whether I treat you well or not, don't talk about it. Since you've decided to enter my sect, then follow me and you will undergo the ritual."

Yang Guo followed her into the back hall, only to see it was sparse and empty, apart from two paintings on the eastern and western wall. On the western wall was a picture of two girls. One of them was around twenty five or six years of age, facing a mirror combing and adorning her hair. The other was a fourteen or fifteen years of age maiden, her hand holding a bucket, standing to the side. The tall girl looking in the mirror was extremely beautiful, her eyebrows tidy, yet in her eyes there was an air of death. Yang Guo took a few glances at the painting, and felt fear and respect towards the girl.

Xiao Longnu pointed to the tall girl in the painting and said, "That is our Ancestor, kowtow to her."

Yang Guo strangely asked, "That's our Ancestor, why is she so young?"

Xiao Longnu said, "She was young in the picture, later she wasn't as young anymore." Yang Guo focused on the two sentences, 'She was young in the picture, later she wasn't as young anymore', he felt sorrow and regret in his heart and tears came to his eyes.

Xiao Longnu didn't notice that he was thinking and pointed to the young girl and said, "That is my Master, quickly kowtow." Yang Guo looked at the painting, and saw the

young girl, who could believe that she would become Xiao Longnu's Master; he didn't hesitate and immediately kowtowed.

Xiao Longnu waited for him to stand up and then pointed to the painting hung on the eastern wall and said, "Spit on that Taoist." Yang Guo took a look at the painting and saw the Taoist was quite tall, a long sword by his side, the index finger on his right hand pointing to the north eastern corner, his back facing out, his face could not be seen.

He was curious and asked, "Who's that? Why should I spit on him?"

Xiao Longnu said, "That is the Quanzhen sect's founder Wang Chongyang, our sect has a rule, after kowtowing to our Ancestor we need to spit on him."

Yang Guo was pleased, he hated the Quanzhen sect, he felt this rule of the sect was a suiting finish; he spat out at the painting, and felt that this was not enough and spat out twice. He was about to do it again when Xiao Longnu said, "Enough!"

Yang Guo asked, "Did our Ancestor really hate Wang Chongyang?"

Xiao Longnu said, "Yes."

Yang Guo said, "I hate him as well. How come the painting is hung on the wall but not destroyed?"

Xiao Longnu said, "I don't know, I only heard from Grandma Sun and my Master that there isn't one good man on earth."

Her voice suddenly became strict and she said, "When you become older and do bad things, shall I spare you or not?"

Yang Guo said, "Of course you'll spare me."

Xiao Longnu originally meant this as a warning, she didn't know he would answer, she was startled and didn't know what to do with him and said, "Quickly greet your Master."

Yang Guo said, "Of course, I must kowtow to my Master. But first you have to got to promise me one thing otherwise I won't kowtow."

Xiao Longnu thought, "According to Grandma Sun, before accepting a disciple, only the Master can request things from the disciple, how can it be turned around and the disciple requests something from the Master?"

She was an emotionless person and didn't get angry, she said, "What is it? Let me hear what you've got to say."

Yang Guo said, "I regard you as my Master, I respect you and obey you, but I don't want to call you Master, I want to call you Gu Gu."

Xiao Longnu was bemused again and asked, "Why?"

Yang Guo said, "I had taken that rotten Taoist from the Quanzhen sect as my Master, he didn't treat me well at all, in my dreams I curse my Master. That's why I want to call you Gu Gu, in case I mistakenly insult you when I insult my Master."

Xiao Longnu smiled slightly and felt that the way in which this child thinks was amusing, and said, "Fine, I agree to this."

Yang Guo then knelt down grandly, and kowtowed loudly eight times in front of Xiao Longnu and said, "Disciple Yang Guo hereby pays respect and acknowledges Xiao Longnu Gu Gu as my Master. Yang Guo will obey her words forever, if Gu Gu is in any sort of danger, I will give up my life to protect her, if someone insults Gu Gu, then I will kill them." In reality Xiao Longnu's skills were better than his by ten fold, but he

saw that she was a beautiful, gentle and fragile girl, a feeling of duty to protect weak girls stirred, and he came out with those words.

Xiao Longnu heard his sincere words, although he spoke with a childish tone, she was touched nonetheless.

Yang Guo finished kowtowing and picked himself up, his face full of glee.

Xiao Longnu said, "Why are you so pleased? My skills can't compare with Quanzhen's Qiu Chuji or your Uncle Guo."

Yang Guo said, "I don't care if they were even more skilled, you are really going to teach me kung fu."

Xiao Longnu said, "Actually there isn't much use in learning kung fu. It's just that there isn't much to do in the tomb, that's why I'm teaching you."

Yang Guo said, "Gu Gu, what's our sect called?"

Xiao Longnu said, "When our Ancestor came and lived in the tomb, she didn't have any contact with the Wulin world, our sect didn't have a name. Later my apprentice sister Li Mochou left and wandered around the world of Jianghu, others said she was a disciple from 'Gu Mu Pai' (Ancient Tomb sect), so let's call our sect the Ancient Tomb sect!"

Yang Guo shook his head, and said, "Ancient Tomb sect isn't a good name."

He had just entered the sect and found fault with the name, but Xiao Longnu wasn't too concerned and said, "Does it matter if the name is good or not? Wait here for me; I'm going outside for a while."

Yang Guo remembered that he would be on his own in the tomb and became scared and said, "Gu Gu, I'll go with you."

Xiao Longnu looked at him and said, "You said you'll obey for eternity, my first order and you don't listen?"

Yang Guo said, "I'm scared."

Xiao Longnu said, "You are a man, what is there to be afraid of? You said you were going to help me get rid of bad people."

Yang Guo thought for a while and said, "Fine, come back quickly."

Xiao Longnu calmly said, "I can't be certain how long I'll be; I don't know if I can catch them so quickly."

Yang Guo said, "Catch what?" Xiao Longnu didn't reply and walked away.

As soon as she left, there wasn't a sound in the tomb. Yang Guo wondered what on earth she's going to catch. She said she will never leave Mount Zhongnan, which means she was going to catch a Quanzhen Taoist, but who could it be. After capturing him I'll torture him for a while, that'll be fun; but Gu Gu is by herself, she might be in danger. He thought wildly for a while, and then exited the hall and headed west in the passageways. After ten or so steps, it was pitch black in front of his eyes. He was afraid that he was going to get lost, he touched the wall and made his way back but after twenty steps or so he lost the light of the main hall. He was afraid, and walked forward faster. He had originally been on the wrong path, but as he carried on, he became even more lost. He ran faster and faster, he crashed into the east and bumped into the west, but felt that there were paths everywhere; he was never going to reach the main hall again. He then loudly called out, "Gu Gu, Gu Gu, save me quickly." The echo resonated for a while before disappearing.

He ran around again for a while, but then felt the ground was damp, his foot had stepped into some mud. He wasn't on the level of the tomb but had run into one of the passageways underground; he was scared and thought, "If I got lost in the tomb, Gu Gu will be able to find me. Now that I'm running around, she won't be able to find me, and when she finds out I escaped she will be very upset." He didn't dare run around anymore; he felt out a stone and sat down, he wanted to cry out but he couldn't.

He sat there for over an hour when he suddenly heard the faint calls of "Guo'er, Guo'er!" Yang Guo was delighted and quickly got up and shouted, "Gu Gu, I'm over here!" The calls of "Guo'er, Guo'er" became fainter. Yang Guo was in a rush and shouted at the top of his voice, "I'm over here!" After a while, he didn't hear anything, when suddenly he felt his ear being tugged, someone was pulling on his ear.

At first he was alarmed but now he was pleased and shouted out, "Gu Gu, you've come, how come I didn't notice anything?"

Xiao Longnu said, "Why are you here?"

Yang Guo said, "I took a wrong turn."

Xiao Longnu sighed and took his hand and walked, though it was pitch black, it was as if she was under the sun, she went around corners and changed paths, she walked extremely fast.

Yang Guo said, "Gu Gu, how can you see in here?"

Xiao Longnu said, "I grew up here in the darkness, so I don't need any light."

Yang Guo had sat there for over an hour and was frightened and regretful, now that he was rescued, he was delighted but he didn't know what to say.

After a while, Xiao Longnu took him to the main hall again. Yang Guo sighed and said, "Gu Gu, just now I was really worried."

Xiao Longnu said, "Worried about what? I'd eventually find you."

Yang Guo said, "I'm not worried about that, I was afraid that you might have thought that I had escaped and become sad."

Xiao Longnu said, "If you did escape, I wouldn't be able to keep the promise I made to Grandma Sun, what is so sad about that?"

Yang Guo heard this and knew there was no use, and said, "Gu Gu, you've caught it then?"

Xiao Longnu said, "I've caught them."

Yang Guo said, "Why did you go and catch them?"

Xiao Longnu said, "I caught them so you can start learning kung fu. Follow me!"

Yang Guo thought, "So she has caught a Taoist to fight with me; that will be interesting. It will be best if she caught that Zhao Zhijing; after being taken care of by Gu Gu, he will have to endure my punches and kicks without being able to retaliate, that'll be great fun." As he followed Xiao Longnu, the more he thought about it, the happier he was.

Xiao Longnu turned a few bends, pushed open a door, and entered a chamber lit with candles. The room was small; it was difficult to turn around with the two of them in there. The ceiling was low, and if Xiao Longnu stretched out her arm she would be able to touch the ceiling. Yang Guo didn't see any Taoists; he was slightly disappointed and asked, "Where is the Taoist you caught?"

Xiao Longnu said, "What Taoist?"

Yang Guo said, "Didn't you say you were going to catch some people to help me practice kung fu?"

Xiao Longnu said, "Who said anything about people? It's in there." She went over the corner of the room and picked up a bag; she untied the bag and tipped it upside down, three sparrows flew out.

Yang Guo thought, "Oh, so Gu Gu went out to catch some sparrows."

Xiao Longnu said, "Catch the three sparrows and give them to me. You mustn't harm their wings or claws."

Yang Guo said, "Fine!" He threw himself forward to catch them. But the sparrows were swift and quick; they flew to the west and darted to east. Yang Guo was out of breath, his head covered with sweat, yet he couldn't even touch a feather of theirs.

Xiao Longnu said, "You won't catch them like that, I'll teach you a way." She then taught him the technique to jump high and dart low, and the ability to catch things quickly. Yang Guo had realized that she caught the sparrows to teach him kung fu; he made sure he remembered this. Although he understood the formulae and method, it wasn't easy to use it straight away. Xiao Longnu let him practice, and left the room.

On the first day Yang Guo wasn't able to catch one. After supper he practiced on the Chilled Jade Bed. On the second day, he could jump higher than before, and his arm movements were much quicker. On the fifth day he eventually managed to catch one. Yang Guo was excited and quickly told Xiao Longnu. He couldn't guess that she wouldn't have any words of praise or encouragement. She

calmly said, "What use is catching one; you must catch all three."

Yang Guo said, "I've already caught one, how hard could it be to catch all three?" He was mistaken; he tried for two days but wasn't able to catch them. Xiao Longnu saw that the sparrows were tired, so she fed them and then let them fly off. She then caught another three for him to practice with. By the eighth day, Yang Guo managed to catch all the sparrows in one go.

Xiao Longnu said, "It's time to go up to Chongyang Palace."

Yang Guo was alarmed and said, "Why?"

Xiao Longnu didn't reply and took him out of the tomb. Yang Guo had not seen daylight in seven days, when he was in the daylight again, he struggled to open his eyes. The two of them arrived at Chongyang Palace. Yang Guo was worried, he kept on glancing at Xiao Longnu but she was expressionless, he couldn't tell what she was thinking. Then he heard her call out in a clear voice, "Zhao Zhijing, come out quickly."

When they arrived at Chongyang Palace, there were people who had gone in and gave the message of their arrival. After she finished speaking, out came tens of Taoists. Two young Taoists supported Zhao Zhijing, his face was haggard, his eyes deep, he had no way of standing up by himself. When the Taoists saw the two of them, they all held their weapons tightly and angrily glared at them.

End of Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 - The Jade Heart Manual

Translated by Noodles



Xiao Long Nu's pair of delicate hands flew out, checking and tapping; the eighty-one sparrows were all kept within a meter of her. Her arms were as if there were engaged in a flying dance, her palms formed a thousand hands and a thousand palms, no matter how hard the sparrows tried to fly away, they couldn't escape from the boundary of her palms.

Xiao Longnu took out a container from her pocket and placed it in your Yang Guo's hand and loudly said, "This is the antidote to the Jade Bee stings, give it to Zhao Zhijing."

When Yang Guo saw Zhao Zhijing, he ground his teeth in fury, but he didn't want to disobey Xiao Longnu so he quickly walked up to Zhao Zhijing and placed the bottle down heavily in front of him. When the Taoists heard that Xiao Longnu had returned to the palace, they thought that she had come back to avenge Grandma Sun, they put up their guard and quickly told Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji and the other elders the news, but they didn't guess that she had come back to bring the antidote, they were startled and could not think of anything to say.

After Yang Guo put down the bottle, he looked at Zhao Zhijing, a vicious expression was on his face; he turned around and walked away.

When Lu Qingdu saw Yang Guo, his blood began to boil, and shouted out, "Little punk, you've been kicked out of our sect, why have you come back?"

The day the "Toad Stance" struck him, he lost his breath, but because Yang Guo's internal energy was shallow, he wasn't seriously hurt. After a few restoring palms by Qiu Chuji and a few days rest, he recovered. Now, he immediately dashed out, wanting to avenge that day's push.

Xiao Longnu said, "Guo'Er, if you want, fight back."

Yang Guo heard footsteps behind him, and heard the wind of a palm, someone was aiming for his neck. In the Tomb of the Living Dead he had slept on the Chilled Jade bed for eight days, and practiced eight days of sparrow catching techniques. Although Xiao Longnu only taught him how to catch sparrows, the Ancient Tomb's lightness kung fu is outstanding, his skills today and that day in the arena were completely different. He didn't move backwards or forwards, and waited for Lu Qingdu's hand to arrive; he crouched down and darted out of the way, and tugged on the sleeve of that hand. Lu Qingdu could not believe that in just a few days, his lightness kung fu had increased dramatically. Influenced by anger he had acted without thinking about the enemy. He had quickly dashed out, his body inclined, his legs unsteady and after being tugged by Yang Guo, he fell down heavily onto the ground.

By the time he picked himself back up, Yang Guo had already hurried to Xiao Longnu's side. Lu Qingdu shouted and cursed, and wanted to go after him. Suddenly a Taoist hurried out from the crowd, grabbed his arm, and pulled him back. When Lu Qingdu was grabbed, he froze, he looked up to see Martial Uncle Yin Zhiping; he cursed under his breath and retreated.

Yin Zhiping called out clearly; "Thank you Miss Long for the antidote." He bowed down and greeted her.

Xiao Longnu didn't take any notice and held Yang Guo's hand and said, "Let's go."

Yin Zhiping said, "Miss Long, Yang Guo is a disciple of the Quanzhen and you insist on taking him away. How can we resolve this?"

Xiao Longnu was startled and said, "I don't want to hear annoying words." She held Yang Guo's arm and went back into the forest. Yin Zhiping, Zhao Zhijing and the other Taoist stood there startled.

The two went back into the tomb. Xiao Longnu said, "Guo'Er, your kung fu has improved, but you tripping the fat Taoist was wrong."

Yang Guo said, "That fat Taoist beat me up badly last time, it's a pity that I wasn't able to get some punches in. Gu Gu, why shouldn't I trip him?"

Xiao Longnu said, "It's not that you shouldn't trip him, it's the way you did it that was wrong. You shouldn't have pulled him to the ground, you shouldn't have raised your hands to make him fall, but let him fall by himself."

Yang Guo was pleased, and said, "That's a fun method, Gu Gu, teach me."

Xiao Longnu said, "I'll be Guo'Er, you'll be the fat Taoist, come and catch me." She then walked forward slowly.

Yang Guo laughed as he went to catch her. It was as if Xiao Longnu had eyes in the back of her head, when Yang Guo ran fast, her steps were fast, when he slowed down, she slowed down, the distance between she and Yang Guo stayed at around a meter.

Yang Guo said, "I'm going to catch you now!" He threw himself forward, Xiao Longnu didn't move. Yang Guo saw that his hands were going to grab her shoulders, but his hands grasped thin air as Xiao Longnu darted backwards, escaping his clutches. Yang Guo quickly turned around to try to catch her, but this move was rushed, he used a force opposite to his momentum, his legs became unsteady, he looked at the ceiling as he fell to the floor and his back ached.

Xiao Longnu took him by the right hand and pulled him up. Yang Guo said, "How come you are so fast?"

Xiao Longnu said, "If you catch sparrows for a year, then you can do this as well."

Yang Guo said, "I've caught them already."

Xiao Longnu chuckled and said, "That counts as catching sparrows? How can our sect's kung fu be learned so easily? Follow me." She then led him to another room. This room was larger than the room where Yang Guo first practiced catching sparrows, at least twice the size. There were six sparrows in this room. This room was larger than before; catching the sparrows will be more difficult. Xiao Longnu passed on some more lightness kung fu and catching techniques to him, eight or nine days later Yang Guo was able to catch the six sparrows in one go.

After that, the stone chambers became larger and larger, the number of sparrows also increased, eventually he moved to the main hall, with eighty-one sparrows.

The Ancient Tomb sect's formulae for internal energy were wondrous, the Chilled Jade Bed's ability to enhance internal energy cultivation was incredible, in just three months, Yang Guo could catch all eighty-one sparrows in one go. Xiao Longnu was pleased with his rapid progress, and said, "We will now go outside and catch sparrows."

Yang Guo had lived in the tomb for three months, and was becoming slightly restless, when he heard that he was going outside to practice, his expression changed to one of delight.

Xiao Longnu said, "What is there to be pleased about? This kung fu is hard to master. There are eighty-one sparrows, you must not let one go."

The two arrived outside. It was March, on the eve of spring. In front of them was a deep green forest, Yang Guo breathed in deeply, and the fragrance of flowers and grasses flowed into his lungs, it was extremely relaxing.

Xiao Longnu opened the bag, the sparrows flew out, then, her pair of delicate hands flew out, checking to the west, and tapping in the east, and forced the sparrows that had flew out to return. The flock of sparrows suddenly got their freedom back, how come they didn't all scatter everywhere? It was strange but Xiao Longnu was checking and tapping, the eighty-one sparrows were all kept within a meter of her. Her arms were as if they were engaged in a flying dance, her palms formed a thousand hands and a thousand palms, no matter how hard the sparrows tried to fly away, they couldn't escape from the boundary of her palms.

Yang Guo looked on with his mouth open. He was startled and pleasantly surprised; he pulled himself together and thought, "Gu Gu is teaching me a wondrous palm technique. Quickly concentrate." He studied her hand movements, how she attacked and how she took her palms back. Her palm technique was extremely quick, but each and every palm was clear, forming the different stances. Yang Guo studied them for over half an hour, although he didn't understand completely the essence of the palms, he understood a bit more than he did at the start.

Xiao Longnu demonstrated the palms again, then she separated her palms and placed them behind her back, the sparrows suddenly flew up towards the sky. Xiao Longnu waved her long sleeves, the two gust of wind from the sleeve pushed out, the sparrows were all pushed back, after much screeching, they beat their wings again to fly away.

Yang Guo was delighted; he tugged her sleeve and said, "Gu Gu, I don't think even Uncle Guo could do that."

Xiao Longnu said, "This set of palms is called the "Force of Nets Above and Snares Below" (tian luo di wang shi), it is one of the Ancient Tomb sect's foundation skills. Work hard and learn it!" She then taught him the stances of the palms; Yang Guo remembered all of them. Within ten days, Yang Guo learned all eighty-one stances of the "Force of Nets Above and Snares Below", and made more progress in his skills.

Xiao Longnu caught a sparrow, and told Yang Guo to prevent its' escape with his palms. At first he could only repel the escape two or three times before the sparrow escaped through the spaces in his hands. Xiao Longnu was standing to the side, she stretched out her hand and sent the sparrow back. Yang Guo continued with his palms, but because his palms weren't fast enough, in just two or three stances again the sparrow flew away. Xiao Longnu again forced the sparrow back so Yang Guo could practice again.

He continued practicing, spring turned to summer, and he advanced his skills a little further. Yang Guo was naturally gifted, and he worked tirelessly, his palm skills kept on improving, by mid autumn, he had mastered this set of "Force of Nets Above and Snares Below". When he used the palm skills he was now able to keep the eight-one sparrows under his control. However, because his internal energy wasn't refined enough, there were times where there were gaps in his stances and he allowed the birds to escape and so he wasn't able to do it all in one go.

That day Xiao Longnu said, "Now that you've completed this set of palms, when you meet that fat Taoist you'll be able to trip him up a few times without using any effort."

Yang Guo said, "What if I fight with Zhao Zhijing?"

Xiao Longnu didn't reply and thought, "When Zhao Zhijing fought Grandma Sun, if he wasn't poisoned, Grandma Sun

may not have won. At the moment, your skills can not compare with his.”

Yang Guo knew what she was thinking when she didn't reply and said, “It doesn't matter if I can't beat him now, in a few years I'll be able to beat him. Gu Gu, our Ancient Tomb sect's skills are better than Quanzhen's, aren't they?”

Xiao Longnu looked up at the ceiling and said, “On this earth, only you and I believe that. When I fought with that Quanzhen Taoist named Qiu, I couldn't beat him, but this isn't because our Ancient Tomb's skills cannot compete with Quanzhen's, it's because I have yet to complete our sect's most refined kung fu.”

Yang Guo had believed all along that Xiao Longnu's skills exceeded Qiu Chuji's, when he heard about this he was curious and said, “Gu Gu, what is this skill? Is it hard to learn? Why don't you practice it again?”

Xiao Longnu said, “I'll tell you a story, then you'll understand our sect's origins. Before you kowtowed to me as your Master, you also kowtowed to our Ancestor. Her surname was Lin, her first name Chaoying, years ago; the two most skilled fighters were our Ancestor and Wang Chongyang. Originally, it was hard to decide who was better, later on Wang Chongyang was busy fighting the Jin, he was occupied night and day; our Ancestor concentrated on her martial arts and eventually became a level higher than him. But our Ancestor did not meddle in the affairs of Wulin, she didn't like showing off, and so hardly anyone in the world of Jianghu knew who she was. Eventually, Wang Chongyang failed in his quest to repel the Jin and resided in the Tomb of the Living Dead; he had nothing to do and refined his martial arts. Our Ancestor wasn't feeling well, and had two serious illnesses, so by the time Wang Chongyang left the tomb our Ancestor was below him again. Eventually the two dueled and made a bet, Wang

Chongyang admitted defeat to our Ancestor, and gave the tomb to her. Come, I'll show the things that the two left behind."

Yang Guo clapped and said, "So this stone tomb was taken out of Wang Chongyang's hands by our Ancestor Grandma. If I had known earlier, I would have been even more pleased with living in the tomb."

Xiao Longnu smiled slightly, and took him to another chamber. Yang Guo saw that the room was extremely strange, it was narrow at the front and wide at the back, the east side was a semi circle, the west side was triangular, and he asked, "Gu Gu, why is this room so strange looking?"

Xiao Longnu said, "This is the room where Wang Chongyang refined his skills, at the front he practiced his palms, at the back he practiced his fists, at the east side he practiced with swords and the west side he practiced projectiles."

Yang Guo looked around the room but didn't find anything special about it.

Xiao Longnu stretched out her hand and pointed upwards and said, "The essence and core of Wang Chongyang's skills is up here."

Yang Guo looked up, but all he saw were some markings and scribbles, they were made by projectiles, some were deep and some were shallow, how could you pick up the essence from that?

Xiao Longnu went over to the east side and pushed an arc a few times, a large stone slowly moved across, revealing a door. She held a wax candle and told Yang Guo to enter. It was another room. It looked like the previous room but it was the complete opposite. The front was wide and the back was narrow, the west side was round and the east triangular. Yang

Guo looked up, and again the ceiling was marked in carvings and symbols.

Xiao Longnu said, "Those are the kung fu left by our Ancestor. She used her intelligence to win the tomb, had she used her martial arts, she would have lost to Wang Chongyang. After she moved into the tomb, she discovered the martial arts skills left by Wang Chongyang. Then she painstakingly developed a set of skills to counter all the skills left by Wang Chongyang. It's all marked down here."

Yang Guo was delighted and said, "That's great. Even if Qiu Chuji, Hao Datong and the rest of them have high skills, they could not be better than Wang Chongyang. All you've got to do is practice the skills left by our Ancestor and you'll be able to beat all the Taoists."

Xiao Longnu said, "You are correct, but it's a pity that there isn't anyone to help me."

Yang Guo said, "I'll help you."

Xiao Longnu glanced at him and said, "It's a pity that your skills aren't good enough." Yang Guo blushed and was embarrassed.

Xiao Longnu said, "The skill that Ancestor Grandma left is called the "Jade Heart Manual", it requires two people to practice it, mutually helping each other. Back then, Ancestor Grandma practiced it with my teacher. Ancestor Grandma had not practiced for long before she passed away, my master did not complete it."

Yang Guo suddenly became delighted again and said, "I'm your disciple, we could learn it together."

Xiao Longnu said, "Yes! Let's take a look. The first step, you have to learn our sect's skills. The second step is to learn the skills of Quanzhen sect. The third step is to learn the skill

that counters Quanzhen sect's skills, the "Jade Heart Manual". When my master passed away, I was fourteen years old. I have learned all our sect's skills, and had just started to practice Quanzhen's martial arts; there is no need to talk about the "Jade Heart Manual". The first step I can teach you, the second and third steps we'll study and practice together."

From that day on, Xiao Longnu passed on all the martial arts of the Ancient Tomb sect to him; palm skills, fist techniques, projectile throwing and weapon stances. After two years, Yang Guo learned it all, plus with the help of the Chilled Jade Bed, his progress was amazing, but his internal energy was not developed as much. A woman developed the Ancient Tomb sect's skills, and the three generations have been women, it was unavoidable that the skills were of a soft nature, the hardness was inadequate. Yang Guo was impatient and rash; the way his skills developed reflected this.

Xiao Longnu had grown slightly older, and became even more beautiful. That year, Yang Guo was sixteen, he became taller, his voice broke, and was now a teenager. He was completely different from boy that first entered the tomb, but Xiao Longnu still looked upon him as the child that first came here. Yang Guo was becoming more and more respectful of his master. In these two years he had curbed his rebellious nature. Before Xiao Longnu opened her mouth to tell him what to do, he had already completed it. But Xiao Longnu's cold and emotionless persona did not change, she didn't casually smile at him, she was detached, she did not show any sign of caring for a loved one. Yang Guo did not mind though. Sometimes Xiao Longnu would play the zither, the music from it was peaceful and serene. Yang Guo would listen quietly by her side.

One day Xiao Longnu said, "You have already learned all of the Ancient Tomb's kung fu, tomorrow we'll learn Quanzhen's kung fu. It will not be easy, back then, even my master did not understand it all, and I of course understood even less. We'll learn from the beginning again, feel free to comment whenever you like."

The next day, the two of them went to the strange shaped room, and practiced according to the markings and symbols that Wang Chongyang left. Because Yang Guo's foundation was now strong, he was able to understand most of the points, and made rapid progress. But after the first ten days, though he practiced for many days instead of making progress he felt that he was going backwards, the more he practiced the worse it got. Xiao Longnu and he discussed this, and both felt there were some difficulties. Yang Guo was impatient and got in a blue mood.

Xiao Longnu said, "When my master and I learned Quanzhen's kung fu, after practicing for a while, we found it was difficult to make any sort of progress, and because Ancestor Grandma had passed away, we could not ask anyone. We didn't know the formulae to accompany it, and so we couldn't solve this problem. I once wanted to go and steal the formula from Quanzhen, and give it to master to study. This is all there is of this skill, it's only Quanzhen's skills, it's not too important if we can't learn it now. There is no need to be angry, there is a solution, all we got to do is go and capture a Quanzhen Taoist and force the formulae out of him, and then our problems will be solved. Let's leave."

These words suddenly awakened something in Yang Guo, and he remembered that Zhao Zhijing had taught him 'The Quanzhen Taoist Song'. 'When first practicing one must open the nine openings. The first originating from the back (wei luu) pressure point. First the spring flows from the bottom of the feet to the knee. Past the knee up to the back, the back's

intent quickly reaching the peak. The Gold Lock passes under the Magpie Bridge, twelve palaces topple as it goes.” He then recited those words out loud.

Xiao Longnu listened to the meaning of the song and said, “It does sound like the important aspects of practicing Quanzhen’s kung fu. If you know more, that’ll be good.” So Yang Guo recited all the formulae that Zhao Zhijing had taught him. The formulae that Zhao Zhijing had taught him was the basics of Quanzhen’s advanced internal energy cultivation, but because he wasn’t taught how to use it, the ‘spring flows’, ‘twelve palaces’ and ‘backs intent’ were all words to him and he didn’t understand, so he just remembered it and didn’t use it.

Xiao Longnu was more experienced and pointed out the key points, and then Yang Guo understood immediately. Within a few months, the two managed to understand and grasp the essence of the skills that Wang Chongyang left on the ceiling.

One day, the two were in the room sparring with swords when Xiao Longnu sighed and said, “At first when I heard that Quanzhen’s martial arts were the most orthodox in the world, I didn’t think too much of it, but today, I know now Quanzhen’s kung fu is actually very profound. Although we have grasped the essence of these skills, if we wanted to learn it to a state where body and mind becomes one, I don’t know how many years and months it is going to take.”

Yang Guo said, “Although the skills of Quanzhen sect are refined, Ancestor Grandma did leave a way to counter their skills, the ability to beat them. That’s called each mountain has its own peak.”

Xiao Longnu said, “From tomorrow onwards, we will learn the “Jade Heart Manual”.

The next day, the two went to the second strange room, and practiced according to the markings left on the ceiling. It was much easier to learn than Quanzhen's skills, since the techniques were used to counter Wang Chongyang's and originated from her own kung fu. A few months passed, and the two had learned the external skills of the "Jade Heart Manual". Sometimes, Yang Guo would use Quanzhen Sword skills; Xiao Longnu would then use the Jade Sword skills to counter it. When Xiao Longnu used Quanzhen Sword techniques, he would use the Jade Sword techniques to neutralize it. The Jade Sword technique was indeed the Black Star (the neutralizing opposite) to Quanzhen's Sword techniques, every stance was designed to stop the attack of Quanzhen's Sword techniques, every step matched the other, every move restricted the opponent and predicted their next move, no matter what the user of Quanzhen Sword skills did, it could not break the confinement of the Jade Sword technique.

The external skills had now been learned; it was time to advance into learning the internal techniques. Quanzhen's internal energies were deep and profound, to invent a method to defeat Quanzhen's internal energies, how easy could that be?

Lin Chaoying's intelligence was unbeatable; she actually did find a way using unorthodox techniques. Xiao Longnu raised her head and looked at the symbols on the ceilings, she was deep in thought and didn't speak; she looked at it for days on end without saying a single word.

Yang Guo said, "Gu Gu, is it hard to learn?"

Xiao Longnu said, "I heard from master that the manual's internal energy requires two people to practice at the same time, but I know I will not be able to practice it with you."

Yang Guo was shocked and quickly said, "Why not?"

Xiao Longnu said, "If you were a girl, then we could."

Yang Guo said, "What is the difference? Aren't a boy and girl the same?"

Xiao Longnu shook her head and said, "No, not the same; look up at the ceiling, what kind of shapes are they?"

Yang Guo looked in the direction she pointed, and saw the ceiling was marked with countless forms of body shapes, there were about seventy or eighty of them, a closer look revealed that they were the shape of women, the bodies had lines going away from them. Yang Guo didn't understand and turned around to look at Xiao Longnu.

Xiao Longnu said, "The manual states, when practicing the whole body will emit heat, a spacious and deserted place is required; the body will need to be free of clothes to practice, this will enable the heat to disperse immediately. There mustn't be any obstructions, otherwise it will return to the body; a small consequence will be a serious illness, at worst the body will be destroyed."

Yang Guo said, "We'll take off our clothes to practice."

Xiao Long said, "Eventually, the two people will need to use their internal energy to protect the other, you are a boy and I am a girl, how can we do that with decency?"

Yang Guo had concentrated on practicing his kung fu for the last two years, and didn't take any notice of the difference in sex between him and his master. He felt there was nothing wrong with taking off their clothes and facing each other to practice the manual; he couldn't see what exactly was wrong with this. Xiao Longnu was now twenty years old and has lived in the tomb ever since she was small; she didn't know anything about the outside world. One of the important points of her sect's kung fu is to purge your emotions.

Although the two were of different sexes and faced each other night and day, one was cold and emotionless, the other was honest and respectful, so there weren't any formalities between them. But now when they were talking about taking their clothes off to practice, she felt awkward and didn't agree with his viewpoint.

Yang Guo suddenly said, "I've got it! We could practice on the Chilled Jade Bed."

Xiao Longnu said, "We mustn't. The heat will be drawn back by the coolness of the bed, after practicing for a few days, we both would be dead."

Yang Guo thought for half an hour and asked, "Why do you need two people to practice it? We could practice it by ourselves, if I don't understand anything, can't I ask you later?"

Xiao Longnu shook her head and said, "It won't work. With this type of internal energy, every step is extremely dangerous and you will go wrong at certain points. If there isn't anyone to help you, you will fire deviate; only if we mutually aid each other can we pass the dangerous phases."

Yang Guo said, "Learning this type of internal energy is indeed troublesome."

Xiao Longnu said, "If we master the external techniques, we will be able to beat the Taoists. We aren't really going to fight with the Taoists, so even if we can't beat them, so what?"

Yang Guo heard his master's words and agreed, and didn't keep the matter to heart.

One day after finishing practicing his kung fu, he went out of the tomb to forage for food. After a while, he chased after a grey rabbit; the rabbit dodged west and darted east, its agility was not like a normal rabbit's. Yang Guo's lightness

kung fu was proficient, but he couldn't catch it. He was surprised but he didn't want to use a projectile to hit it; he wanted to chase after it with his lightness kung fu until the rabbit couldn't run anymore. The boy and rabbit ran faster and further away. As they went on, the rabbit turned into a treed enclosure in the mountain, and suddenly darted into a thicket of red flowers. The thickets were tens of feet wide, the layers close together; a fragrant scent was produced from them. He went around the thickets, but the rabbit had long disappeared. Yang Guo had chased the rabbit for half a day; but he liked living things, if he had caught up with it he would have let it go, so if he didn't catch it, it didn't matter. Yang Guo looked at the thickets; they had red flowers and green branches, and were beautiful to look at. Surrounding them were low hanging branches that hid them, forming a natural room made of flowers and a house made of trees. Yang Guo thought for while, and quickly hurried back and got Xiao Longnu to take a look.

Xiao Longnu calmly said, "I don't like flowers, if you like it, you can play here."

Yang Guo said, "No, Gu Gu this is a good place to practice martial arts, you go on one side, I'll be on the other. When we take off our clothes, we won't be able to see each other. Isn't that a good idea?"

Xiao Longnu heard this and thought it made sense. She leaped up onto a tree and looked around, all she could hear was the sound of a spring flowing and birds chirping; it was peaceful and serene all around, and there wasn't any trace of human activity. It was a good place to practice martial arts, and so she said, "It was lucky that you found this place, we'll come here tonight and practice."

That night, the two of them delved deep into the enclosure. In the still of the night, the flowers were even more fragrant.

Xiao Longnu then recited the formulae to practice the internal energy of the “Jade Heart Manual”. Yang Guo made sure he understood the intricacies of the manual, and the two went either side of the thickets and took their clothes off, and started practicing. Yang Guo’s left arm went through the thicket, and met with Xiao Longnu’s right palm, if either came up with difficulties during the practice; the other will notice and immediately circulate their chi to help them.

The two then used the night for work, and the day for rest. It was summer; the night was cool when they practiced; after two months of practicing there were no problems. The “Jade Heart Manual” was divided into nine sections, one night, Xiao long Nu had reached the seventh level, and Yang Guo the sixth. That night, the two were practicing their own levels, their body emitted great heat, and the scent of the flowers was carried in the heat, and was even more aromatic. Gradually the moon moved into the middle of the sky, another half an hour and the two will have finished completing their respective levels. Suddenly the sound of footsteps and people talking came from some distance away; two people were talking and coming closer.

On the odd levels of the “Jade Heart Manual” the practitioner has to ‘Yin Jin’ (forcing yin to the limit), the person on the even levels has to ‘Yang Tui’ (Drawing back the yang). Yang Guo was practicing the ‘Yang Tui’ techniques, and could rest at any time, but Xiao Longnu was practicing the ‘Yin Jin’ technique, which had to be completed in one go without the slightest pause. Right now she was at the most important phase of the technique, and ignored the sounds of speaking and footsteps.

Yang Guo heard this clearly, he was alarmed, and forced the chi that was in his ‘dan tian’ out of his body, and breathed in three times and stopped practicing. He heard the two people gradually getting closer, their voices seemed familiar; one of

them was his previous master Zhao Zhijing, the other Yin Zhiping. The voices became louder as they went on, the two were arguing.

He heard Zhao Zhijing say, "Apprentice brother Yin, there is no point in denying it. I'll go and tell Martial Uncle Qiu, and let him judge."

Yin Zhiping said, "You keep on pressing me, what do you want? You think I don't know? You want to become the head of the third generation students, so in the future you can become the sect's leader."

Zhao Zhijing chuckled and said, "You don't keep to the rules. Now that you've broken one of sect's rules, how can you be the head of the third generation disciples?"

Yin Zhiping said, "What have I done wrong?"

Zhao Zhijing scolded, "The fourth rule of Quanzhen sect, wanton!"

Yang Guo hid in the thicket and peeped out, and saw the two Taoists standing facing each other. Yin Zhiping's face was pale, under the moonlight it was colorless, and he said deeply, "What wanton crime?" As he said these words he reached for the handle of his sword.

Zhao Zhijing said, "Ever since you saw that Xiao Longnu from the Tomb of the Living Dead, you daydream all the time. You have thought about taking Xiao Longnu many, many times and doing unspeakable things to her. Our sect aims to bring enlightenment, but with these thoughts, how have you not broken the 'wanton' rule?"

Yang Guo respected his master very much, when he heard those words from Zhao Zhijing, he was furious, and hated the two Taoists even more.

He heard Yin Zhiping tremulously saying, "What rubbish; just how could you know what I think?"

Zhao Zhijing chuckled and said, "The thoughts in your heart, of course I don't know them, but when you mumble in your sleep, is there anyone to hear it? When you write Xiao Longnu's name repeatedly, is there anyone to see it?"

Yin Zhiping shuddered twice, and didn't say anything.

Zhao Zhijing looked smug, and took out a piece of paper from his sleeve and waved it around and said, "Isn't this your handwriting? I'll show this to our leader Martial Uncle Ma and your master Martial Uncle Qiu."

Yin Zhiping couldn't endure this anymore, and drew out his sword with a shout and thrust out. Zhao Zhijing leaned to the side to avoid it, and put the piece of paper in his sleeve and laughed, "You want to kill me and shut my mouth? I'm afraid it won't be easy."

Yin Zhiping didn't say a word and thrust out his sword three times, but each thrust was avoided. By the fourth thrust, a sound was made as Zhao Zhijing drew out his own sword, and fought with him by the thicket of red flowers. The two of them were the highest skilled fighters of Quanzhen's third generation, one, Yin Zhiping, was Qiu Chuji's finest disciple, and the other, Zhao Zhijing, was the head disciple of Wang Chuyi. Yin Zhiping clenched his teeth and fought with his life, within the exchange of moves, Zhao Zhijing would say a few sarcastic words, angering his opponent into making mistakes. Yin Zhiping had the highest martial arts amongst Qiu Chuji's disciples, however in the recent years Yin Zhiping has placed Taoist cultivation above martial arts. Hence, his younger martial arts brother Yin Zhiping and Wang Chuyi's head disciple, Zhao Zhijing, have surpassed Yin Zhiping in the field of martial arts. Yin Zhiping often retreated to contemplate Taoist philosophies and meditation and had

expressed no interest in leadership. Zhao Zhijing had the highest martial arts of the entire third generation disciples. The Six Masters of Quanzhen intended to appoint him as the leading disciple of the third generation. However, he made two enormous errors; one was leading the Big Dipper Formation against Guo Jing instead of Huo Du and his men. As result a portion of the Chongyang Palace was burnt down. His second error was mistreating Yang Guo, which angered the six masters. As result they felt that Zhao Zhijing's martial arts may be good, but he does not have the talent to lead. So after much deliberating the Six Masters agreed to appoint Yin Zhiping as the leading disciple of the third generation.

Yang Guo had learned all the stances of Quanzhen's Sword skills, and saw them fight, attacking and defending, though the stances were quick and changes numerous, he saw through all of it and thought how his Gu Gu had indeed taught him correctly. He saw them struggle for tens of stances; Yin Zhiping had used all his attacking stances as Zhao Zhijing kept on moving. He chuckled, "I have learned all that you have learned, and you have learned all that I have learned. You want to kill me? You're dreaming." He defended smoothly, Yin Zhiping had used all his strength but each stance was blocked. After a while, he saw that the two was getting closer to Xiao Longnu, Yang Guo was alarmed and thought, "If they two fight until they get to Gu Gu, it would be terrible!"

Suddenly Zhao Zhijing counterattacked, and forced Yin Zhiping back. He quickly sent out three stances, Yin Zhiping moved back three steps. When Yang Guo saw the two getting further away from his master, he was pleased, but suddenly Yin Zhiping handed his sword over to his left hand and sent out a palm, aiming for the chest.

Zhao Zhijing laughed and said, "Even if you've got three hands, you've only got the ability to be a petty thief, you

can't kill me." He then sent out his left palm to meet it. The two exchanged sword stances and palms, and the struggle became fiercer.

Xiao Longnu was concentrating, and ignored everything that was around her. When the two took a few steps closer, Yang Guo became worried; when they took a few steps further away he relaxed a bit.

After a while, Yin Zhiping suddenly called out and attacked, he ignored the opponent's sword and just rushed forward. Zhao Zhijing thought about it, and knew that he had nothing to lose, if he killed him, then he wouldn't be able to blackmail him. Although the two weren't on friendly terms, he had no intent in killing him, and after a while, he was on the way to losing. After a number of moves, Yin Zhiping then thrust out his sword, threw out a palm and his left leg swept out, it was Quanzhen's "Three Circulations". Zhao Zhijing leapt up ten feet, and swung his sword down. Yin Zhiping threw his sword away, and threw himself at his opponent, a 'hei' sound was made by him as he threw out his two palms. Yang Guo saw that the last few stances were ruthless, it wasn't how he knew them to be, he broke out in a cold sweat, he saw Zhao Zhijing's body in midair, one was yielding, one was firm, it looked like the two palms were aiming to break his bones. How it could be that in this urgent and dangerous situation, Zhao Zhijing managed to flip himself in midair, fly back a few meters and lightly land.

From the way he was going to land, it looked like he was going to land right in front of Xiao Longnu, Yang Guo was alarmed and had not time to think, he stood up, his left palm shot out from below his right palm, and pushed the back of Zhao Zhijing, a stance of "Bright Building Flinging the Ball" (cai lou pao qiu), he pushed out with strength, and hit him away about seven meters. Right now his internal energy wasn't developed enough, he had used an enormous amount

of strength in this attack, all concentrated in his left arm, his lower body was weak, he could not stand up properly and his left foot stepped on a branch. The branch quickly rebounded back to its original position, and touched Xiao Longnu in the face. It was only a slight touch, but Xiao Longnu was greatly disturbed, she broke out in a sweat, at that time she was in the middle of rapidly circulating her chi and holding it in her 'dan tian', it didn't disperse and she fainted.

All of a sudden Yin Zhiping saw Yang Guo jump out, and saw the woman he has been thinking about hiding in the thicket, he froze, and didn't know whether this was real or an illusion. Zhao Zhijing had steadied himself by this time, and under the moonlight he was able to recognize Xiao Longnu's face. He said, "Ah, so she's here; and with a man!"

Yang Guo was alarmed and shouted out, "Don't go anywhere you two rotten Taoists, I'll come back and finish this." He saw Xiao Longnu had fallen onto the ground and was not moving. He remembered that he was told that when they were practicing they must stay together to help each other, if there were any disturbances a disaster would happen. Now Xiao Longnu had experienced a shock, she would have serious injuries; he was extremely frightened and touched her forehead. It was cold as ice; he quickly grabbed her clothes and covered her up. He picked her up and said, "Gu Gu, are you alright?" Xiao Longnu moaned but didn't say anything.

Yang Guo was slightly more relaxed and said, "Gu Gu, we'll go back to the tomb first, then I'll come back and kill the two Taoists." Xiao Longnu had no strength and lay limp in his arms. Yang Guo advanced in large steps, and went past the two Taoists. Yin Zhiping stood there like a statue.

Zhao Zhijing laughed and said, "Apprentice brother Yin, your dream lover and that man over there have just done dirty

things; you want to kill me, you should kill him!” Yin Zhiping didn’t take any notice and didn’t reply.

Yang Guo heard the words ‘done dirty things’, although he didn’t know exactly what he meant, he knew it was an insult and he was furious. He lightly put Xiao Longnu down and rested her against a tree and took a branch in his hand, and pointed to Zhao Zhijing and shouted, “What rubbish are you talking about?”

Two years had passed, Yang Guo had changed from a small child to a tall young man, at first Zhao Zhijing didn’t know who he was, when he heard him a second time and saw his face under the moonlight, he recognized it was his disciple. He had been made to fall by him and was angry, he saw his body was exposed and shouted, “Yang Guo, so it’s you, you little bastard!”

Yang Guo said, “You can insult me, but why are you insulting my Gu Gu?”

Zhao Zhijing laughed and said, “Everyone knows the Ancient Tomb sect is a female sect, skills are only passed on to women and not men, all of them are pure and untouched virgins, but it’s a filthy sect, secretly hiding a man, doing these things in the open!”

Xiao Longnu had just wakened up and heard what he said, and was alarmed. Her chi had begun to flow normally but now it flowed the opposite way, her chi and air were both stimulated and she knew that she was suffering from internal injuries. She could only shout “You talk rubbish, we have not...” before she spat out blood violently from her mouth.

Yin Zhiping and Yang Guo were worried when they saw this, and both of them rushed closer.

Yin Zhiping said, "How are you?" and bent down to take a closer look at her injuries.

Yang Guo knew that he wanted to harm her and pushed him in the chest with his left hand. Yin Zhiping moved his palm to block it. Yang Guo was familiar with every stance of Quanzhen's kung fu, he turned his palm over and grabbed his wrist, he first pulled and then let go, and tossed him away.

At present, Yang Guo's kung fu could not actually compare with that of Yin Zhiping, and if Yang Guo fought with other sect's fighters who were of the same ability as Yin Zhiping he would definitely have lost. But years ago Lin Chaoying had invented techniques to counter Quanzhen's, every stance matched every stance. Since she invented these techniques they had never been used in practice, so Quanzhen's disciples do not know that there is a kung fu which is the 'Black Star' of theirs. Yang Guo now used it. Yin Zhiping was not prepared and wasn't concentrating, and didn't have any way to respond; although he didn't fall, he was flung over six meters and was standing next to Zhao Zhijing.

Yang Guo said, "Gu Gu, ignore them, I'll take you back to the tomb first."

Xiao Longnu struggled for air as she said, "No; kill those two so they can't...can't talk about me outside."

Yang Guo said, "Fine." He leapt out at them, his branch pointing at Zhao Zhijing's chest. Zhao Zhijing didn't care about Yang Guo and waved his sword, cutting down at his branch. He didn't know that Yang Guo was using the 'Black Star' of Quanzhen's sword skills; the branch swiveled past and struck the pressure point on Zhao Zhijing's wrist. Zhao Zhijing's wrist went numb, and he secretly cursed. Yang Guo's left hand chopped across, aiming for his left cheek, this was an extremely strange move, and it was the most

unexpected. If Zhao Zhijing wanted to keep his sword, he would have to straighten his head and suffer the chop, if he wanted to avoid the chop, the sword will definitely be lost.

Zhao Zhijing was skilled, although he was in a precarious situation he kept calm, he let go of his sword and ducked his head, if he followed it with a left palm, he will be able to get his sword back in the blink of an eye. He could not have guessed that years ago Lin Chaoying had thought of how the enemy would react, and developed techniques to counter any changes, no matter how good, clever or lethal, any of highly skilled Quanzhen fighters were. Zhao Zhijing felt that he made the best decision possible, and would allow him to definitely gain victory from the jaws of defeat. But he didn't know that Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo had learned all the techniques that would counter their changes.

Yang Guo removed the enemy's weapon and saw his left palm move, and knew what he was going to do; he pushed the sword forward, aiming to pierce the opponent's wrist. Zhao Zhijing was alarmed and quickly moved his arm back. Yang Guo pointed the sword tip at his chest and shouted, "Get down!" as his left leg hooked out. Zhao Zhijing was afraid of being pierced and had to move, he was hooked and fell backwards. Yang Guo raised the sword, wanting to thrust at his stomach.

Suddenly, a wind came from behind him, a sword was approaching and someone shouted out, "You dare to kill your master?" That stance was to attack first and then allow him to rescue Zhao Zhijing, Yang Guo was in the middle of an angry attack but could still see what was happening, and he immediately parried it with his sword, the two swords clashed. Yin Zhiping saw that the sword was extremely fast and couldn't help from secretly praising it, and suddenly felt his sword going out of his control, sticking to the opponent's sword. Alarmed, he quickly circulated his chi to get it back.

His internal energy was profound, the two competed, and Yang Guo's sword was lead along. He didn't know that Yang Guo lured him into doing this, he held the sword for a split second before letting go, his arms straightened and he attacked the enemy's chest. At that point the sword handle rebounded up, two palms and a sword, the three of them with the same intent, even if Yin Zhiping's skills were higher, he would not be able to block this extremely strange attack.

At this time, Yin Zhiping could only throw away his sword and send out his own palms, he quickly put his hands across his chest to block this move, but because his arms were too bent, he could not put any strength in them. Yang Guo's internal energy wasn't high enough and wasn't able to break his arms with this move, but was still able to strike his chest painfully. Yin Zhiping's arms became numb; he moved back three steps and circulated his chi to protect the important pressure points in his chest. Zhao Zhijing got up. The two swords were in Yang Guo's hand, and he attacked both of them.

In just a few moves, the two of them were made to hurry around and scamper by a teenager; they were both afraid and angry and didn't dare be careless. The two of them stood up, and used their palms skills; they only defended and didn't attack. They wanted to find out more about their opponent's techniques before doing anything. Although Yang Guo had weapons to fight against his empty handed opponents, the two defended tightly, and weren't being beaten as badly as they were at the start. The "Jade Heart Manual's" sword techniques did not have any stances that countered Quanzhen's fists and kicks. Lin Chaoying wanted to defeat Wang Chongyang's techniques completely, she felt that using weapons to defeat his hand to hand combat techniques was unfair and below her so she did not give it any thought. That, plus the fact that the Taoists internal energy was well above Yang Guo's, and since all they cared

about was to remain undefeated, Yang Guo's swipes and chops did not have much effect, and eventually he began to lose.

Zhao Zhijing's internal energy was profound; he kept incessantly producing palm winds that aimed at Yang Guo's sword.

Yin Zhiping stopped, and secretly thought that here they were, two seniors attacking a young boy, how ridiculous did they look? He saw that victory was in sight but worried about the safety of Xiao Longnu so he shouted, "Yang Guo, quickly take your Gu Gu away, what are you doing tangling with the two of us?"

Yang Guo said, "Gu Gu hates you for talking rubbish, and told me that I must kill you."

Yin Zhiping sent out a palm that shook Yang Guo's sword in his left hand and then jumped left three steps and said, "Leave!"

Yang Guo said, "You want to escape?"

Yin Zhiping said, "Yang Guo, you want to kill us but that will not be possible; but your Gu Gu can relax, if the one named Yin reveals a single word about what happened today, I will immediately kill myself to apologize. If I don't do this" as he said this, he suddenly leapt towards Yang Guo and took the sword in his left hand and said, "then I'll be like these fingers!" He spread his left hand and cut down with his right, and cut the last two fingers off his hand.

Those few moves happened extremely quickly and Yang Guo wasn't prepared. He stopped and knew that he was sincere and thought, "It is indeed difficult to kill them both; why don't I first kill the one named Zhao and then come back and kill him."

He then shouted, "The one called Yin, what use is cutting off your fingers? If you cut off your head, then I'll believe you."

Yin Zhiping smiled and said, "If you want my life, all I need is a word from your Gu Gu, then why not?"

Yang Guo said, "Go!" He leapt forward two steps and suddenly thrust out behind him, straight at Zhao Zhijing's chest.

The move "Orchid Shoots Back" (mu lan hui she) was extremely ruthless, Zhao Zhijing was listening to what they were saying and never thought that he would suddenly ambush him, he was frightened. The tip of the sword pierced his stomach. Zhao Zhijing felt a slight pain, and immediately circulated his chi throughout his 'dan tian', and his stomach pulled back half an inch, he raised his right leg and kicked Yang Guo's sword out of his hand. Yang Guo didn't wait for his leg to come and down, and extended his finger and pointed at the pressure point on his knee. Although Zhao Zhijing had escaped with his life, he couldn't stand up, his right knee kneeling down in front of Yang Guo.

Yang Guo caught the descending sword and pointed at Zhao Zhijing and said, "I once kowtowed eight times to you as you were my master, now you are not my master anymore, give the eight kowtows back."

Zhao Zhijing had completed circulating his chi, his face became purple, almost becoming black. Yang Guo pressed the sword tip into his throat.

Zhao Zhijing shouted, "If you want to kill me, kill me, why are you talking so much?"

Yang Guo was about to thrust the sword forward when suddenly he heard Xiao Longnu say, "Guo'Er, killing your master is not auspicious, tell him to swear that he won't

reveal today's events and let him go!" Yang Guo regarded Xiao Longnu's commands above all else, and after hearing what she said, he said, "Swear it."

Zhao Zhijing was angry, but his life was more important and said, "I won't say anything, what need is there to swear it?"

Yang Guo said, "That won't do. You must swear a venomous oath."

Zhao Zhijing said, "Fine, today's events will be kept between the four of us, if I reveal it to a fifth person, then let my name be in ruins, be expelled from my sect, everyone in Wulin will be against me, and I'll have a terrible death."

Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo did not know much about the world's matters and thought that he was really swearing a venomous oath."

Yin Zhiping heard that there was a hidden meaning in his oath and wanted to warn Yang Guo but felt that it wasn't right to help outsiders; he watched Yang Guo carrying Xiao Longnu, his steps extremely quick, and they disappeared around a bend in the mountain. His fingers hadn't stopped bleeding; he stood up bemused without stopping it.

Yang Guo carried Xiao Longnu back to the tomb and placed her on the Chilled Jade Bed.

Xiao Longnu sighed and said, "I'm seriously injured, how can I oppose the Chilled Jade Bed?"

Yang Guo said 'ah' and was alarmed, he secretly thought, "So Gu Gu's injury is very serious." He then carried her to her room. When she first let Yang Guo sleep on the Chilled Jade Bed, she slept in the same room as him; after about a year she moved into the next room. As soon as she arrived in her room, she spat out another pool of blood, and covered Yang

Guo's exposed body. Yang Guo was so frightened that he couldn't move his arms and legs, and started to cry.

Xiao Longnu calmly laughed and said, "Now that I've spat out this blood, I won't throw up anymore, what is there to be sad about?"

Yang Guo said, "Gu Gu, don't die."

Xiao Longnu said, "You are afraid of dying aren't you?"

Yang Guo was startled and said, "Me?"

Xiao Longnu said, "Before I die, I will kill you first."

These same words were spoken two years ago, Yang Guo had forgotten them long ago, and didn't expect that she would bring it up again now.

Xiao Longnu saw that Yang Guo was astounded and said, "If I don't kill you, how will I be able to see Grandma Sun? Who will look after you if you are alone in the world?"

Yang Guo's mind was scrambled, and didn't know what to say.

Xiao Longnu had thrown up blood, but she looked fine as if nothing was wrong. Yang Guo thought of something, he quickly went to find a jar of Jade Bee honey and gave it to her to drink. The honey did have healing properties; after a while she slept on her bed. Yang Guo was able to relax, but he was worn down with worry, and wasn't able to endure anymore, he sat down and slept against the wall.

After some time, he felt someone cold against his throat, and was awakened. He has lived for a long time in the tomb, although he wasn't able to see things in the dark as clearly as Xiao Longnu could, he could still see things without the aid of candlelight. He opened his eyes, and saw Xiao Longnu

sitting forward on the bed holding a sword, pointing at his throat. He was alarmed and said, "Gu Gu! You..."

Xiao Longnu calmly said, "Guo'Er, my injury won't get better, after I kill you we'll both see Grandma Sun together!"

Yang Guo quickly replied, "Gu Gu!"

Xiao Longnu said, "You are afraid, aren't you? It will be quick, one slash and that's it."

Yang Guo saw Xiao Longnu's eyes light up, and knew that she wanted to kill him immediately. He wanted to live, and didn't consider what will happen later, he rolled around and kicked out at Xiao Longnu's sword. Though Xiao Longnu's internal injuries were serious, she was still very swift, not slower than normal; she avoided his kick and pointed the sword at his throat again. Yang Guo used many different stances, but each one of them had been taught by Xiao Longnu so how would she not know what he would do? The sword moved swiftly, not leaving him by more than three inches.

Yang Guo was frightened; his body was covered with sweat. He thought, "If I don't want to die today, then I must kill Gu Gu."

In this urgent situation he pushed out his two palms, he took advantage of her not having any strength after her injury, her stances were refined but she did not have the internal energy to clash palms with him. Xiao Longnu knew what he was thinking, she slanted her body slightly and let his palms' power skim over her shoulders and called out, "Guo'Er, don't fight anymore!" Her sword extended out, the tip quivered a little, an incomparable stance in terms of mastery and exquisiteness was used, "Separating Flower Splitting Willow", shimmering to the left but moving to the right, and the sword pointed at Yang Guo's throat. She then circulated

her remaining energy wanting to pierce his throat; but she saw his pleading eyes, and felt pain in her heart. At that instant, her eyes went blank, her body went limp, a 'dang lang' sound was made as the sword dropped to the floor, as Xiao Longnu fainted.

Had the sword been thrust forwards, Yang Guo would have died; he didn't know that she would faint at the most vital point. He stopped, wondering if he'd really escaped death, and quickly ran out of the tomb. The sun dazzled in his eyes, the light breeze blew his clothes, the scent of flowers was around him, birds sang in the trees, isn't this better than living in the tomb?

Yang Guo made his decision; he utilized his lightness kung fu and ran down the mountain, he became quicker as he ran, and by midday he was at the foot of the mountain. When he knew Xiao Longnu had not chased after him, he relaxed, and slowed his pace. After a while, his stomach growled. He had wandered the world of Jianghu ever since he was little; his ability to search for food was brilliant. He looked all around, and on the western slope, he saw a large field of corn, went over, and then picked five stalks. The corn wasn't ripe but it was still edible. He had a match and was about to light a fire to smoke the corn, when he suddenly heard footsteps behind him, someone was approaching.

Yang Guo first hid the corn in case a farmer had caught him in the act of stealing, and then peaked out. It was a Taoist priestess, dressed in apricot yellow, her steps were light and she was slowly advancing. A pair of swords hung on her back, a blood red tassel was tied to the handles, floating in the breeze. Yang Guo thought that this person must be a member of the Quanzhen sect, and was likely to be a disciple of Sun Bu'Er. Yang Guo was still slightly afraid and didn't want to cause any trouble so he looked down at a branch.

The Taoist priestess went up to him and asked, "Hey, point the way to Chongyang Palace?"

Yang Guo secretly thought, "If this girl is a disciple of Quanzhen, then how come she does not know the way up there? Something was wrong here." He then pointed to the mountain without looking around and said, "Just follow that main road."

The Taoist priestess saw that Yang Guo's upper body was uncovered, he was wearing a pair of old and worn trousers, and was here picking up firewood, and assumed that he was just a villager. She regarded herself as an attractive woman; any man that looked at her would stare at her without blinking for half an hour. This young boy just took a glance at her and didn't look back again, like if he was blind. She couldn't refrain from getting angry and suddenly thought, "What does a stupid villager like him know?" She then said, "Stand up; I have something to ask you."

Yang Guo hated everyone in the Quanzhen sect, so he pretended to be blind and dumb, and pretended not to hear.

The Taoist priestess said, "Foolish boy, you didn't hear what I said?"

Yang Guo said, "I heard, it's just that I don't want to stand."

When the Taoist priestess heard him she laughed and said, "Look at me, I told you to stand up!" Her voice in the last two sentences was soft, enchanting and sweet. Yang Guo shivered and thought, "Why does she speak so strangely." He looked up and saw her skin was smooth and white, her cheeks were red, her eyes were like staring into a pool of water, there didn't seem to be any evil intent; after looking at her again, he lowered his head.

The Taoist priestess saw that his expression had a childish air, though he did look at her for a second time, he wasn't moved. Instead of being angry she laughed, and thought, "It's just a kid who doesn't know anything." She took out two silver ingots [small boat/shoe shaped silver castings of a few ounces known as Yinzi] from her pockets, two 'ting' noises were heard as they collided with each other, she said, "Little brother, if you follow my instructions then I'll give these ingots to you."

Yang Guo originally didn't want to have anything do with her, but he heard that her words were suspicious and wanted to find out what she wanted so he pretended to be stupid, and looked at the ingots and said, "What use do those shiny rocks have?"

The Taoist priestess smiled and said, "It's money. If you want new clothes, chickens, rice, you could buy them with this."

Yang Guo put on a baffled expression and said, "You want to lie to me, I don't believe you."

The Taoist priestess laughed and said, "When have I lied to you? Hey, little kid, what is your name?"

Yang Guo said, "Everyone calls me 'Sha Dan' (Dumb Egg), don't you know that? What's your name?"

The Taoist priestess laughed and said, "Sha Dan, you can call me Angelic Priestess, where's your mother?"

Yang Guo said, "My mum just scolded me, and went over to the other side of the mountain to chop firewood."

The Taoist priestess said, "I need a hatchet, go to your home and get one, and then lend it to me."

Yang Guo was curious, he opened his eyes wide, drooled and made himself look even more like a stupid person, he shook

his head incessantly and said, "I can't; I can't lend my family's hatchet. If dad finds out I'll be punished."

The Taoist priestess smiled and said, "When your parents see the money, they'll be too pleased to punish you." As she said this she passed an ingot in his direction. Yang Guo extended his hand to catch it, and then pretended to miss it, and let the ingot hit his shoulder and when it came down it hit his right foot, he held his right foot with his hands and hopped on his left foot and called out, "Ah, ah, you hit me! I'm going to tell mother!" He called and shouted; he ignored the ingot and ran forward.

The Taoist priestess thought that he was interesting, and smiled. She took off her belt, and waved it at his right foot. Yang Guo heard the wind sound and turned his head around, he was alarmed, and thought, "That's our Ancient Tomb sect's kung fu! Isn't she a disciple of Quanzhen?" He didn't dodge and let her belt wrap around his right leg, he fell on the ground and relaxed his body, letting her pull him towards her, and secretly feared, "Is she going up the mountain to attack Gu Gu?"

He thought about Xiao Longnu, he didn't know whether she was dead or alive, he was extremely worried about her. He made up his mind, even if he was going to die by her hand he needed to see her. As he was thinking he was pulled up to the Taoist priestess, she saw that although his face was covered with dirt, he was handsome, and thought, "This country hick is handsome, it's a pity that although the top is like a beautiful flower, the lower part is a pile of grass." She heard him shouting and calling out, making a commotion; she smiled and said, "Sha Dan, do you want to die or do you want to live?" She took out her sword and pointed at his chest.

Yang Guo saw that she used the stance “Flower from the Embroidery Pen” (jin bi sheng hua), it was a sword stance of the Ancient Tomb sect, he was perplexed, “This person is probably a disciple of Martial Uncle Li Mochou, and has come to find Gu Gu, she must have ill intentions, from her belt and sword stances her kung fu is good, I’ll keep on pretending to be dumb so she’ll be off guard.”

He put on a frightened expression and begged, “Xian Gu (Angelic Priestess), don’t...don’t kill me, I’ll listen to you.”

The Taoist priestess laughed and said, “Good, if you don’t listen to me I’ll kill you with one sword stroke.”

Yang Guo called out, “I’ll listen...I’ll listen.” The Taoist priestess waved her belt, and it returned to her waist, her expression was leisurely. Yang Guo quietly said, “Great!” but his face still had a blank expression. The Taoist priestess thought, “How could the stupid boy appreciate this skill? I might as well show it off in front of a blind man.” She said, “Quickly go home and get the hatchet.”

Yang Guo hurried to a nearby farmer’s house, he pretended to limp; his footsteps were heavy, strutting and staggering, appearing clumsy. The Taoist priestess saw he wasn’t a pleasant sight and shouted, “Don’t tell anyone, hurry.”

Yang Guo replied, “Okay!”

He quietly opened the door to the farmer’s house, and saw no one was inside, and assumed that they were working in the fields; from the wall he picked up a short hatchet that was used to chop firewood. He also took an old shirt from a rack and wore it, and then returned still carrying the dumb expression.

Although he was trying making a fool out of the Taoist priestess, he was worried about the safety of Xiao Longnu,

and couldn't stop from having a burdened look on his face.

The Taoist priestess angrily said, "What's with the crying face? Quickly smile for me."

Yang Guo opened his mouth and laughed foolishly.

The Taoist priestess wrinkled her brows and said, "Follow me up the mountain."

Yang Guo quickly said, "I can't...I can't, mother told me not to run around."

The Taoist priestess shouted, "If you don't listen then I'll kill you immediately." She stretched out her left hand and held his ear, while her right hand raised her sword, as if she was about to slash down.

Yang Guo quickly blurted out, "I'll go...I'll go!"

The Taoist priestess thought, "That person is as stupid as a pig, just what I need." She then pulled on his sleeve and started up the mountain. Her lightness kung fu was not weak so naturally her steps were quick. Yang Guo kept on stumbling about, his left foot high, right foot low, he was far behind her and after a while he sat on a rock by the roadside, incessantly wiping away his sweat and was out of breath. The Taoist priestess ran on ahead.

Yang Guo said, "You run like a rabbit, how can I keep up?"

The Taoist priestess saw that the sun was in the west, she was troubled and impatient, she returned and grabbed his arm, and hurriedly went up the mountain.

Yang Guo couldn't keep up, his arms and legs were everywhere, and soon kicked her in the back of the leg.

The Taoist priestess shouted "Ai ya!" and angrily said, "Do you want to die?" But she saw that he was out of breath and

extremely tired, so she stretched out her left hand and grabbed his waist and said, "Let's go!" She seized his body and headed up the mountain, she utilized her lightness kung fu, and in a few moments she had passed over many li.

As Yang Guo was being carried by her, he felt her soft body and smelled her feminine scent, he didn't waste an ounce of energy and let her carry him up the mountain. She hurried for a while and then looked down and saw a smile creep upon his face. He was looking very comfortable; she couldn't stop from being angry, loosened her arm, and tossed him on the ground and angrily shouted, "Are you feeling happy?"

Yang Guo rubbed his backside and called out, "Ai yo, ai yo, the Xian Gu hurt Sha Dan's backside."

The Taoist priestess was angry but was amused at the same time and said, "Why is your surname Sha (Foolish/Dumb)?"

Yang Guo said, "Yes, I'm called Sha Dan. Xian Gu, mother said my surname is not Sha; it's Zhang. Why is your surname Xian (Angel/Immortal)?"

The Taoist priestess said, "Just call me Xian Gu, and don't worry about my surname." She was the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' Li Mochou's disciple Hong Lingbo. She was the young Taoist priestess who was sent to kill the Lu couple and Madam Wu. Yang Guo wanted to know her surname but she didn't reveal it. The Taoist priestess sat on a rock, the wind scattered her hair. Yang Guo secretly glanced at her and thought, "That priestess is quite pretty, but can't compare with Peach Blossom Island's Auntie Guo, and of course cannot compare with my Gu Gu."

Hong Lingbo glanced at Yang Guo, smiled and said; "Sha Dan, why are you staring at me?"

Yang Guo said, "I'm just looking what reason is there? If you don't let me look, I won't look, what's so special?"

Hong Lingbo said, "Look then! Hey, am I nice to look at?" She then took out a comb from her pocket, and slowly combed her hair.

Yang Guo said, "You are nice to look at, but...but..."

Hong Lingbo said, "But what?"

Yang Guo said, "But you are not white enough."

She had always regarded her skin as white and smooth as gems, when she heard him say this; she couldn't refrain from getting angry, she stood up and shouted, "Sha Dan, do you want to die? Saying I'm not white enough...humph!"

Yang Guo shook his head and said, "Not white enough."

Hong Lingbo said, "Who's whiter than me?"

Yang Guo said, "The one that slept by my side last night is much whiter than you."

Hong Lingbo said, "Who? Is it one of your family members?" The thought of killing the woman who had whiter skin than her crossed her mind.

Yang Guo said, "Nope, it's my family's white lamb."

Hong Lingbo turned her anger into laughter and said, "You really are stupid, how can you compare a person with an animal? Let's go!" She took his upper arm and hurried up the mountain. Straight ahead was the road to Chongyang Palace, but Hong Lingbo headed west, in the direction of the Tomb of the Living Dead.

Yang Guo thought, "Indeed she is trying to find my Gu Gu."

Hong Lingbo ran for a while and then took out a map from her pocket, looking for her destination.

Yang Guo said, "Xian Gu, we can't go ahead, there are ghosts in the forest."

Hong Lingbo said, "How do you know this?"

Yang Guo said, "The forest has a large tomb, the tomb has evil spirits, no one dares to go near it."

Hong Lingbo was delighted and thought, "True enough, the Tomb of the Living Dead is around here."

In the past few years, she has been under the tutelage of Li Mochou, and her martial arts had made good progress. In Shanxi, she helped her master to defeat many people of the Wulin world, and pleased her master. She heard her master mention the matter of dueling with the Quanzhen Elders, and said if she'd mastered the "Jade Heart Manual", she wouldn't have feared the Quanzhen Taoists. She said that there was a pile of manuals and scriptures of their sect's skills in the tomb. Hong Lingbo asked why she didn't go to the tomb and study their sect's skills. Li Mochou ambiguously replied, saying that she had conceded the place to her younger apprentice sister, there wasn't much friendly feeling between the two, and were not in contact with each other. Li Mochou was extremely proud, the many times she tried to enter the tomb, being found out and being sent scurrying away were not mentioned to her disciple. Instead she said that her apprentice sister was young, her martial arts were ordinary, and being the elder apprentice sister it wasn't right to bully the younger one. She then encouraged her master to enter the tomb and take the manuals. In reality, there wasn't a day that Li Mochou didn't think about this, but she wasn't familiar with the booby traps in the tomb, and so did not dare to do anything. When she heard her disciple talking about this she just smiled and did not reply.

Hong Lingbo mentioned this many times, but when she saw that her master did not care one way or another, she secretly decided to be more attentive, and asked her about the way to Mount Zhongnan's tomb. She managed to draw a map, but she didn't know that Li Mochou had not revealed everything to her. At this time, Li Mochou had sent her on a mission to kill one of their enemies; after she finished, she went to Mount Zhongnan by herself, and by coincidence met Yang Guo; she now ordered Yang Guo to chop down the pine trees that were blocking the way to the tomb.

Yang Guo thought that even with a year and a half of pine chopping, they would not be anywhere near the tomb; but he pretended to be dumb and followed her orders. More than half an hour later, the sky became dark, they had not even traveled a few li, and they were still very far from the tomb. He was becoming more and more anxious about Xiao Longnu. He thought, why not lead her forward to the tomb and see what she has planned; so he raised his hatchet and hacked down a few times, and then hacked a rock, sparks flew and the edge of the hatchet rolled up.

He loudly shouted, "Ai ya, ai yo, there's a rock here. The hatchet is ruined; father is going to beat me. I...I need to go back home."

Hong Lingbo was extremely anxious, she looked for the way to the tomb, she must enter the tomb tonight, and shouted out, "Sha Dan, stay here!"

Yang Guo said, "Xian Gu, aren't you scared of ghosts?"

Hong Lingbo said, "If ghosts try to scare me then I'll chop them in half with my sword."

Yang Guo was happy and said, "You aren't lying to me?"

Hong Lingbo said, "Why should I lie to you?"

Yang Guo said, "Since ghosts are scared of you, I'll take you to the large tomb. If ghosts come out, you must scare them away!"

Hong Lingbo delightedly said, "You know the way to the tomb? Quickly take me there." Yang Guo was afraid that she was going to become suspicious and so made her promise three times that she must kill the evil ghosts. Hong Lingbo comforted him, and told him to relax, and promised him that even if ten ghosts come out she will kill them all.

Yang Guo said, "A few years ago, I was grazing my lambs near the tomb and fell asleep, when I woke up it was the middle of the night. I saw a female ghost dressed in white exiting the tomb, it scared me to death, and I tripped while I was trying to run away and cracked my head, look there's a scar here." He then walked up to her, wanting her to feel his forehead. She had carried him all along the way, and he felt that she had the scent of orchids around her, leaning against her was quite relaxing. He continued with his plan, and put his forehead in front of her face.

Hong Lingbo laughed and said, "Sha Dan!" and just felt his forehead, she didn't feel any scars but didn't really notice and said, "Take me there quickly."

Yang Guo took her hand and lead her out of the forest, and took her to the secret path leading to the tomb. It was nearing the middle of the night; there was no light from the stars or moon. Yang Guo took her hand, and felt a warm and soft hand and wondered, "Gu Gu and her are girls, why is it Gu Gu's hands are as cold as ice and hers are warm." He took her hand and pulled it. If anyone from the Wulin world treated Hong Lingbo with any disrespect, she would have killed them, but she knew that Yang Guo was just a simple fool, and she wanted his help. She thought that he was handsome, she was secretly quite pleased and quietly said,

“That Sha Dan is not completely stupid; he knows that I’m good looking.”

Very soon, Yang Guo had led Hong Lingbo to the tomb. When he’d left the tomb he was confused and flustered, he didn’t close the tomb’s door; now he saw the large stone slab that was used as the door was still to the side. His heart jumped around and he prayed, “I hope Gu Gu is not dead so I’ll be able to see her again.” He decided that he couldn’t mess around with Hong Lingbo, and said, “Xian Gu, I’ll lead you forward, if a ghost eats me up and I become a ghost, I’ll haunt you forever.” They then entered.

Hong Lingbo thought, “That Sha Dan is strangely brave.” She didn’t give it any more thought, and followed closely in the dark, she had heard from her master that the paths in the Tomb of the Living Dead were complicated, all you need to do is take one wrong step and you’ll be lost. She watched Yang Guo moving without delaying for the slightest second, turning to the east and then twisting to the west, opening a door there, and pushing a stone over here, like he knew the way.

Hong Lingbo thought, “What’s so hard about the paths in the tomb? Could it be that master lied to me, in case I entered alone?” In just a few moments, Yang Guo had led her deep into the tomb, outside Xiao Longnu’s room.

He opened the door lightly, and listened carefully, he couldn’t hear anything and wanted to call out “Gu Gu!” but remembered that Hong Lingbo was right behind him so he quietly said, “We’re here!”

Hong Lingbo was now deep within the tomb, although she was skilled in martial arts and daring, she felt uneasy. When she heard Yang Guo say this, she quickly entered and took out a match, and lit the candle on the table. She saw a girl in white lying on a bed. She knew she would meet her Martial

Uncle in the tomb, but she didn't know that she would find her lying down peacefully, not knowing whether she was sleeping or ignoring her. She held her sword across her chest and said, "Disciple Hong Lingbo greets Martial Uncle."

Yang Guo opened his mouth, it felt as if his heart jumped out of it, he concentrated on the Xiao Longnu's movements, but she didn't move an inch. After a while, she gave out a quiet 'en' sound. From when Hong Lingbo first said something to Xiao Longnu up to Xiao long Nu's reply, Yang Guo was extremely anxious and worried, he wanted to throw himself on Xiao Longnu to hold her and cry. When he heard her reply he was very relieved; he was also extremely delighted and wasn't able to hold in his tears and cried loudly.

Hong Lingbo asked, "Sha Dan, what's wrong with you?"

Yang Guo said, "I'm...I'm scared."

Xiao Longnu slowly turned around and quietly said, "Don't be afraid, I've just died once, it wasn't painful at all."

Hong Lingbo saw that she had an extremely beautiful face, and was startled. She thought, "Such a beautiful girl living on this earth!" She couldn't but feel inferior, and said, "Disciple Hong Lingbo greets Martial Uncle."

Xiao Longnu quietly said, "My apprentice sister? Is she here?"

Hong Lingbo said, "My master told me to come here first, and asked about Martial Uncle's well being."

Xiao Longnu said, "Just leave, this place is not for you, even your master can't come here."

Hong Lingbo saw that her face looked unwell, there were bloodstains on her chest, she was short of breath when

talking, it looked like she had a serious injury. She then let down her guard slightly and asked, "Where's Grandma Sun?"

Xiao Longnu said, "She died a long time ago...just leave now."

Hong Lingbo became even more relaxed and thought; "It's fate; who would have thought that I, Hong Lingbo, would become the heir to the tomb." She saw that Xiao Longnu seemed to be on death's doorsteps, and was afraid that if she died, no one would know the whereabouts of the "Jade Heart Manual". She quickly said, "Martial Uncle, Master ordered me to obtain the "Jade Heart manual". If you give it to me, then I'll immediately help you cure your injury."

Xiao Longnu had practiced the tomb's martial arts for a long time, she didn't have any emotions, nothing was able to affect her; but now she was suffering a serious internal injury and lost her self control. When she heard what she said, she was alarmed, and fainted again. Hong Lingbo dashed over and searched her body, Xiao Longnu woke up and said, "Where's my apprentice sister? Get her here; I have something to say to her."

Hong Lingbo saw that their sect's highest arts were within her grasp, she couldn't wait, she chuckled and took out silver needles from her pocket, and said, "Martial Uncle, you recognize these needles, if you don't give the "Jade Heart Manual" to me then don't blame me for being impolite."

Yang Guo had experienced the poison of the "Soul Freezing Silver Needles" before; he had only held one in his hand and he felt the effects. If one pierced the body, what's going to happen then? He saw the danger and quickly called out, "Xian Gu, there's a ghost, I'm scared." He threw himself over her, hugging her back, and used his finger to press down on the 'Chaste Shoulder' (jian zhen) and 'Main Entrance' (jing men) pressure points. Hong Lingbo could not have dreamed

that 'Sha Dan' would possess such advanced martial art skills, her whole body became numb and she stood there paralyzed. Yang Guo was afraid she had the ability to unblock her pressure points so he heavily pressed down on 'Large Bone' (ju gu) pressure point, and said, "Gu Gu, this girl is really evil, should I prick her a few times with these needles?" He wrapped his hand with his garment and picked up the needles.

Hong Lingbo wasn't able to move an inch and she heard what he said clearly. He saw him pick up the needles and laughing 'ha-ha' towards her, she was frightened out of her wits. She wanted to plead but couldn't open her mouth, her eyes revealed the state of mind she was in.

Xiao Longnu said, "Guo'Er, close the door to the tomb in case my apprentice sister arrives."

Yang Guo said, "Yes!"

He was about to turn around when he heard an enchanting female voice from behind saying, "Apprentice sister, how are you? I arrived a long time ago."

Yang Guo turned around alarmed, under the candlelight, he saw a beautiful Taoist priestess standing at the door, her cheeks peach, her mouth seemed to form a smile but it did not, it was the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' Li Mochou.

When Hong Lingbo first started to ask about the whereabouts of the Tomb of the Living Dead, she knew that Hong Lingbo would go to the tomb herself to steal the "Jade Heart Manual". When she sent Hong Lingbo to Changnan to kill, she had really planned it all. She secretly followed all along; she saw how Hong Lingbo met Yang Guo, how they entered the tomb, how she tried to force Xiao Longnu to hand over the manual and how she lost. Because she was extremely

quick and her steps extremely light, Hong Lingbo and Yang Guo did not notice her. Now she revealed herself.

Xiao Longnu got up and called out, "Apprentice sister!" then coughed incessantly.

Li Mochou coldly pointed at Yang Guo and said, "Who is he? Ancestor Grandma's rule, no man is allowed to take one step into the tomb, and you allow him here?" Xiao Longnu was coughing violently, and had no way to reply. Yang Guo stood in front of Xiao Longnu protecting her and clearly said, "She's my Gu Gu, this is none of your business."

Li Mochou chuckled and said, "Good Sha Dan, you're very brave!" She waved her fly whisk three times, making three 'fu' sounds. Although the three moves were done one after the other, they arrived at the same time. It was one of the lethal stances of the Ancient Tomb sect; other sect's fighters do not know the essence of the stance and would have their bones broken as soon as she used it. Yang Guo was familiar with all the skills of the Ancient Tomb sect, though his internal energy wasn't as profound as Li Mochou's he was still able to dodge the three moves in one "Three Swallows in the Forest". Li Mochou's fly whisk returned, she was secretly alarmed, she saw that his dodging techniques were from their sect, she sternly said, "Apprentice sister, who is this little scoundrel?"

Xiao Longnu was afraid that she was going to throw up blood again and didn't dare raise her voice, and quietly said, "Guo'Er, greet your Martial Uncle."

Yang Guo gave a 'humph' sound and said, "She counts as my Martial Uncle?"

Xiao Longnu said, "Bend your ear over, I've got something to say to you."

Yang Guo knew that she wanted him to kowtow to Li Mochou, but he didn't want to, so he still lowered his ear.

Xiao Longnu quietly said, "On the corner of the bed by my leg, there is a stone panel, turn it to the right and quickly leap up onto the bed."

Li Mochou thought that she was ordering her disciple to apologize to her; in front of her was a seriously injured person, the other was a youngster, why would she care about them? She was thinking of a way to torture them and force her apprentice sister to hand over the "Jade Heart Manual".

Yang Guo nodded his head, and clearly said, "Disciple greets Martial Uncle!" He slowly stretched out his hand towards the part of the bed near Xiao Longnu's leg, indeed there was a stone panel, so he turned it with all his strength and quickly leaped onto the bed.

Li Mochou was shocked, and remembered there were booby traps everywhere in the tomb. Her master was biased; she concealed them from her and taught her apprentice sister where they were and how to use them; she immediately dashed over to grab Xiao Longnu.

Xiao Longnu had no strength to retaliate at present. The bed was heavy, Li Mochou had spotted this earlier, and she was extremely quick in her movements and was about to grab Xiao Longnu off the bed. Yang Guo was alarmed, and with all his strength pushed out a palm to repel her hand away. He suddenly saw darkness in front of him, two thudding sounds, and the bed had dropped into a lower level. The stone slab on the ceiling automatically pushed back up; Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo were separated from Li Mochou and her disciple.

Yang Guo could make out that there was a table and some chairs in the room, he made his way to the table and took out

a match and lit a half burned candle.

Xiao Longnu sighed and said, "There isn't enough blood in my body, I am unable to circulate my internal energy to heal myself. Even if I wasn't hurt, the two of us would not be able to beat my apprentice sister". When Yang Guo heard her say there wasn't enough blood in her body, he raised his left arm, and singled out his vein on his wrist and bit down on it as hard as he could; blood came flowing out. He placed his wound by Xiao Longnu's mouth, and his blood dripped in.

Xiao Longnu's body was ice cold, when the warm blood entered her, her body started to warm up, she knew this wasn't right and wanted to struggle, but Yang Guo knew what she was thinking and pressed down on a pressure point on her waist, stopping her from moving. After a while, the wound started to dry up, Yang Guo bit on it again, and then bit his right wrist. After donating blood several times, Yang Guo felt faint and dizzy, he sat up straight and unsealed her pressure point. Xiao Longnu looked at him for a while and didn't say anything then started to heal herself. Yang Guo saw that the candle was about to burn out, and replaced it.

That night the two of them meditated together. Yang Guo was recovering from his lost of blood. After taking in Yang Guo's blood, Xiao Longnu strengthened, and knew that her life was saved. She opened her eyes and smiled slightly towards Yang Guo. Her cheeks were normally white, but Yang Guo now saw that they were red, like rouge on white jade; he was delighted and said, "Gu Gu, you've recovered." Xiao Longnu nodded her head. Yang Guo was happy but didn't know what to say.

Xiao Longnu said, "We'll go to Grandma Sun's room, I have something to say to you."

Yang Guo said, "Aren't you tired?"

Xiao Longnu said, "I'm fine." She stretched out her hand and pulled on a bracket on the wall, a stone slab moved and revealed a path. Yang Guo had never seen this path before. Xiao Longnu led him in the darkness and eventually arrived at Grandma Sun's room.

She lit a candle, and turned Yang Guo's garment into a bag, and placed her gold silk gloves in it. Yang Guo stood there looking at her and asked, "Gu Gu, what are you doing?"

Xiao Longnu didn't reply, and placed two jars of Jade Bee honey into the bag.

Yang Guo delightedly said, "Gu Gu, we are leaving, aren't we? That will be great."

Xiao Longnu said, "You go by yourself, I know you are a good boy, you treat me very well."

Yang Guo was shocked and said, "What about you?"

Xiao Longnu said, "I made an oath to my master, I must stay in the tomb and never leave. Unless...unless...I won't leave." She shook her head as she said this.

He saw that her face was stern, her voice still, she wasn't going to allow any back chat from him so he didn't say anything. But this was an important matter; he eventually plucked up the courage and said, "Gu Gu, if you don't go, I won't go. I want to stay with you."

Xiao Longnu said, "Right now, my apprentice sister is probably guarding the paths out of the tomb, she wants to force me to hand over the "Jade Heart Manual". My kung fu is not near hers, and I'm hurt, I won't be able to beat her, will I?"

Yang Guo said, "No."

Xiao Longnu said, "The food we've got left will only last twenty days if we stretch it, if we also eat the Jade Bee honey, we'll last a month. After the month passes, then what?"

Yang Guo stood there for a while and said, "We'll rush out, although we won't beat Martial Uncle, it may be possible to escape with our lives."

Xiao Longnu shook her head and said, "You know your Martial Uncle's martial arts and temper, and should know that we won't be able to escape. Not only will she torture us, but our deaths will be unbearable."

Yang Guo said, "If this is the case, it will be even harder for me to escape by myself."

Xiao Longnu shook her head and said, "No! I'll fight with her and lure her deep within the tomb; this will give you a chance to escape. When you get to the entrance, shift the large stone on the left, and pull on the brackets, two large stones weighing ten tonnes will drop down, sealing off the tomb forever."

Yang Guo became even more startled as he heard this, and said, "Gu Gu, you'll be able to open the stones, won't you?"

Xiao Longnu shook her head and said, "No. Years ago when Wang Chongyang was rebelling against the Jin, he made a plan; this stone tomb was his storage place for money, supplies and weapons. It is heavily booby trapped, the layout a secret, and he set up two large ten tonne stone slabs at the entrance, called the "Dragon Snapping Stones" (duan long shi). In case they failed against the Jin and the Jin found out about this place and came to attack, it would be a few against many. In that case he would lower the stone, sealing off the tomb; the attackers of the tomb would not be able to leave with their lives. Once the stone drops, it will not open

again. You know how narrow the path leading into the tomb is; it only allows for one person at a time to pass. Even if there were thousands of the enemy that entered the tomb, they could only form a long line; only one person could touch the large stone and that one person will not be able to lift the stone. With this plan, that old Taoist was saying that even in death he will not give in, and he wanted to perish with the enemy. After he failed against the Jin, he lived by himself in the tomb. The Jin emperor knew where he was, and sent tens of martial artists to kill him; in the end they were all captured or killed by Wang Chongyang. Not one returned. Later, that Jin emperor died suddenly, a new emperor was appointed, and left him alone, and so the two 'Dragon Snapping Stones' were never used. When Wang Chongyang left the tomb, he told Ancestor Grandma about all of the tomb's booby traps.

The more Yang Guo listened the more startled he became, with tears in his eyes he said, "Gu Gu, I'll follow you in life and death."

Xiao Longnu said, "What use is there in following me? You said the outside world was a great place to play, just go and play. With your standard of martial arts, the Quanzhen Taoists will not be able to do much to you. You managed to trick Hong Lingbo, you are much cleverer than me; there is no need for me to look after you."

Yang Guo rushed up to her and hugged her, crying, "Gu Gu, if I'm not able to leave with you, I won't be able to enjoy my life."

Xiao Longnu was cold and loveless, her words were cold and harsh, but right now for some reason she felt a rush of warm blood to her chest, her eyes ached, she wanted to cry. She was startled and remembered what her master had told her before she died, "The kung fu you are practicing is an emotionless type of advanced martial arts, if, later on, you

cry and reveal your true feelings, not will only your martial arts suffer, your life will be in danger. Remember this.” Then she pushed Yang Guo away and coldly said, “Whatever I say, you have to listen.”

Yang Guo saw that she was still strict and stern, and didn't dare to say another word. Xiao Longnu put the bag on his back and took a long sword off the wall, and gave it to him and then sternly said, “When I tell you to go, you must immediately go, once you are outside, immediately lower the stone to close off the tomb. Your Martial Uncle is extremely ruthless, the chance will be gone very quick, are you going to obey me?”

Yang Guo choked, “Yes.”

Xiao Longnu said, “If you don't do as I have told you, when I'm dead in hell, I'll hate you forever. Go!” She took hold of his hand, opened the door and left. Whenever Yang Guo touched her hand, it always felt like ice, but now in her grasp, he felt her palm was sometimes cold, sometimes warm, and completely different from normal. But right now he was too emotional; he had no time to think about such trivial things, and followed her out. After traveling for a while, Xiao Longnu touched a stone slab and quietly said, “They are just in front. I'll lure my apprentice sister away, and you'll leave by rushing to the exit in the northwest corner. If Hong Lingbo chases you, attack her with ‘Jade Bee Needles’.” Yang Guo's heart was fluttering all over the place, and just nodded.

The “Jade Bee Needles” are a skill of the Ancient Tomb sect; years ago Lin Chaoying had two lethal projectiles, one was the “Soul Freezing Needles”, the other was the “Jade Bee Needles”. The “Jade Bee Needle” was a gold needle that was as thin as a hair, sixty percent was made of gold, the other forty percent consists of steel, and had a drop of poison from

the Jade Bees on it. Although it was small, the gold was heavy and allowed it to be thrown over a long distance. This projectile was too venomous, Lin Chaoying rarely used it; after her middle age, her kung fu had reached the acme of perfection, and so there wasn't a need to use them at all. Because Li Mochou had not agreed to swear an oath that she would remain in the tomb forever, when her master passed on the skill of the "Soul Freezing Needles" she did not teach her the "Jade Bee Needles".

Xiao Longnu waited, and then rotated the brackets on the wall, two 'zha' 'zha' sounds were made as the wall slowly opened to the left. Her pair of silk belts immediately flew out, the left heading for Li Mochou, the right heading for Hong Lingbo, her body flying extremely swiftly forwards. Li Mochou had long ago unblocked Hong Lingbo's pressure points and she had shouted at her for a little while. They were in the room trying to figure out where they were and looking for a way out when suddenly they saw Xiao Longnu attacking, the both of them were startled.

Li Mochou's fly whisk flew out to block Xiao Longnu's belt. The fly whisk and the silk belt were soft objects, soft against soft, but Li Mochou's internal energy was superior to that of Xiao Longnu's, the two weapons clashed, and Xiao Longnu's weapon was sent back. The belt in her left hand returned, the right was sent out, in just a short while many stances were exchanged, the two silk belts were gentle and swift. Li Mochou was startled and angry, thinking, "So master was biased, she did not teach me these skills!" But she was able to defend against it, but didn't want to try to kill her, firstly the "Jade Heart Manual" wasn't yet in her hands, if she killed her it would be difficult to find the manual in this large stone tomb, and secondly, she wanted to see what other great skills that her master had bestowed on Xiao Longnu.

Hong Lingbo had always regarded herself as intelligent, but today she was tricked by a boy, she was fooled into thinking he was dumb for over half a day and wasn't able to see through it. She was furious with him, she saw that her master and Xiao Longnu were fighting heatedly, and said, "Sha Dan, your little scoundrel's trickery isn't bad." She took out her swords, and took half a step and called out, "See if I can cut your nose off." Her swords chopped and slashed, 'chi' 'chi' 'chi' as several stances were unleashed. Yang Guo saw that she was advancing fiercely and could only raise his sword to block. In normal circumstances, Yang Guo would make some sarcastic comments and joke around with her, but now he was thinking about having to part with Xiao Longnu, warm tears were in his eyes, everything was blurry in front of him, he made a few stances, but there wasn't any intention of attacking.

Hong Lingbo had used many stances; although she wasn't able to hurt him, she saw that there was no strength in his stances. She thought that he must possess average skills. She became even more careless, and didn't even consider the fact that he had sealed her pressure points before.

Li Mochou and Xiao Longnu fought for another ten moves, Li Mochou's fly whisk flipped up wrapping around her left silk belt and said, "Apprentice sister, take a look at my skills." She dispersed her chi into her weapon and the belt was cut into two pieces. In normal duels with weapons, it was difficult for one person's weapon to shatter the enemy's weapon. The fly whisk and the silk belts were extremely soft objects, she had just used her fly whisk to split the belt in half, and this was ten times more difficult than using a sword to shatter another sword. Li Mochou demonstrated her skills and her face swelled with pride.

Xiao Longnu didn't react, and said, "How good are your skills?" Her half belt shot out and wrapped itself around the

thread end of the fly whisk, the belt in her right hand shot out and tangled the handle, one pulled to the left and one to the right, and the fly whisk snapped in half. In terms of power, this move was lower than when Li Mochou had snapped the belt in half, but it was extremely fast and the technique of dispersing her chi into the belts was exquisite, Li Mochou's move cannot compare with Xiao Longnu in this department. She was slightly alarmed and threw down her weapon; she snatched the belts, gradually forcing Xiao Longnu back. Another ten moves passed and Xiao Longnu was forced to the eastern wall, and saw that she had nowhere else to go. She suddenly touched the wall and called out, "Guo'Er, escape quickly!" A 'ka' sound was heard as an exit appeared in the northwest corner.

Li Mochou was shocked and quickly turned around, wanting to stop Yang Guo. Xiao Longnu threw down her belts and threw out two palms with the intent to kill. Li Mochou had to turn around to block it.

Xiao Longnu shouted, "Guo'Er, why aren't you leaving?"

Yang Guo looked at Xiao Longnu and saw that there was no over turning of this decision and shouted, "Gu Gu, I'm going now!" He quickly threw out three stances, the sword tip pointing towards Hong Lingbo.

Hong Lingbo had seen Yang Guo's sword stances were weak, but of a sudden it had strengthened so much, she could only jump back from the danger. Yang Guo darted out of the door, he turned around, wanting to look at Xiao Longnu for one last time.

Xiao Longnu and her apprentice sister were fighting bare handed, after practicing the "Jade Heart Manual" her variation of stances had greatly increased, although she was seriously wounded, she managed to hold her own after tens of moves. She saw the image of Yang Guo's back at the door,

and thought how they would never meet each other again, her chest heated up, her eyes ached, wanting to cry. She has never shown her true emotions before; today she wanted to cry twice. She was frightened.

When clashing palms with a highly skilled fighter, how can one allow oneself to be slow? Li Mochou saw Xiao Longnu standing there and took the opportunity to advance; she grabbed her wrist and sealed the 'Returning Orthodox' (hui zong) pressure point, and hooked out a leg. Xiao Longnu wasn't able to stand upright and fell onto the floor.

Yang Guo turned his head around, only to see Xiao Longnu hooked onto the floor by her apprentice sister. He then saw Li Mochou was about to harm his master, blood rushed through his chest and he called out, "Don't harm my master!" He darted back into the room, then leapt over to her and grabbed Li Mochou by the waist. This move didn't belong to the stances of any school or sect; it was just an urgent reaction from Yang Guo in this dangerous situation.

Li Mochou was preoccupied with wanting to pick up Xiao Longnu, and wasn't prepared for Yang Guo coming back and grabbing her, for the time being she wasn't able to escape. She was ruthless and violent, not restrained by the practice of religion like she should be, but she guarded her body like a treasure. After spending many years wandering the world of Jianghu, she was still a virgin, and now suddenly she was held tightly by Yang Guo. All she felt now was the warmth of a man spreading from her back into her heart, her heart stirred, her whole body softened, her face was red, and there was no strength in her hands. Xiao Longnu took the chance to unblock her pressure point, but Hong Lingbo was now pointing her sword towards Yang Guo's back. Xiao Longnu was looking up from the ground, when she saw the sword coming she rolled to the left, and moved Yang Guo and Li

Mochou at the same time, Hong Lingbo's sword pierced thin air.

Xiao Longnu leapt up and shouted, "Guo'Er, get out quickly!"

Yang Guo held tightly onto Li Mochou's waist and called out, "Gu Gu, get out quickly, I'm holding her down, she won't be able to move." During this time, Li Mochou's head was filled with thoughts, she knew that this was a urgent situation where there is only a hair separating life and death, but being held by Yang Guo caused her heart to be enchanted, and didn't think of escaping.

Xiao Longnu was curious and wondered, "With my apprentice sister's martial arts, how could she be held down by Guo'Er, not moving an inch? Could it be that her pressure points have been blocked?"

She saw that Hong Lingbo's left hand was about to try to pierce Yang Guo again, so she stretched out two fingers and pushed the flat side of the sword in her right hand, the sword leaped up, heading for the sword in Hong Lingbo's left hand. A clashing sound, Hong Lingbo's hands became numb, the handles of the swords dropped on the floor. She jumped back in shock.

When the swords clashed, sparks flew, it was during this time when Li Mochou noticed that Xiao Longnu had looked at her strangely; she couldn't stop from being furious and shouted, "Little punk, do you want to die?" She generated chi into her arms and escaped from Yang Guo's hold, she leapt up and was about to throw out a palm towards Xiao Longnu.

Xiao Longnu was busy concentrating on Yang Guo's movements when she suddenly felt Li Mochou's palm arriving, there was no time to use stances to neutralize the palm, she could only return a palm to block, but she felt her apprentice sister's profound internal energy, she felt pain in

her chest. She saw Yang Guo had picked himself up, and was coming to help her, she shouted, “Guo’Er, you aren’t going to listen to me, are you?”

Yang Guo said, “I’ll listen to whatever you say, but I won’t listen to what you are saying now. Gu Gu, I’ll follow you in life and death.”

Xiao Longnu heard his sincerity in his words, and was touched again, she saw that Li Mochou was about to throw out another palm, she knew right now that with her serious internal injuries, she would not be able to take this palm, so she ducked and darted to the side and picked up Yang Guo, and hurried out of the room through the stone door. Li Mochou followed the blur, and stretched out her hand to grab her back and shouted, “Don’t go!”

Xiao Longnu waved her hand back, ten or so “Jade Bee Needles” were shot back. Li Mochou suddenly smelled the sweet scent of honey, and knew that this projectile was lethal. She was startled and quickly bent back, she knocked into Hong Lingbo and both of them dropped onto the floor.

They heard extremely quiet ‘ding’ ‘ding’ ‘ding’ sounds, as the needles struck the wall, then they heard two ‘zha’ ‘zha’ sounds, it was Xiao Longnu who had taken Yang Guo out of the room, turned the switch, and closed the door.

End of Chapter 6.

Chapter 7 - Chongyang's Markings

Translated by Noodles



Yang Guo pushed open one of the stone lids, gently placed her inside the coffin, and then leaped inside, lying together face to face with her. The two of them together in the coffin didn't allow much space to move. Xiao Long Nu was happy and also puzzled.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu rushed through the passages of the tomb, and hurriedly exited the tomb; Yang Guo was delighted and took some deep breaths under the starlight. He said, "Gu Gu, I'll lower the 'Dragon Snapping Stone' and trap the two evil women in the tomb." As he said this he searched around for the switch to the booby trap.

Xiao Longnu shook her head and said, "Wait, let me return inside first. My master instructed me to guard the tomb, and mustn't allow it to fall into other people hands."

Yang Guo said, "If we block the door, they won't be able to live."

Xiao Longnu said, "If that happens, I won't be able to return to the tomb. I will never dare to disobey my master. Not like you!" She stared at him.

Yang Guo's blood rose through his chest, he held her arm and said, "Gu Gu, I'll listen to you orders."

Xiao Longnu resisted her feelings, she was afraid of getting emotional, she didn't dare to say another word and pulled his hand off, she entered the tomb and said, "Lower the stone!" She kept her back to him, she was afraid she was going to change her mind so she didn't look at him again.

Yang Guo made up his mind, he breathed in deeply, his chest was filled with the fragrance of flowers and grasses, he looked up and saw the sky filled with stars, glittering continuously, and thought, "This is the last time I'll be able

to look at stars.” He quickly went to the left of the tomb’s monument, and followed the instructions of Xiao Longnu, he used his internal energy to shift a stone, behind it was a round stone, he held the round stone and pulled out. The stone revealed a hole, sand started to pour out, and the two large stones above the tomb’s door descended slowly down.

The two stones weighed over ten tonnes, years ago when Wang Chongyang was designing the tomb; he had used the combined strength of hundreds to complete it. Now the tomb was being sealed, even if Li Mochou, Xiao Longnu and Hong Lingbo’s skills were higher, they will not be able to escape from the tomb. Xiao Longnu heard the sound of the stones descending; she couldn’t hold back her tears and turned around. Yang Guo waited for the stone to be two feet away from the ground and then suddenly used a stance “The Jade Girl’s Dive” (yu nuu tou suo), his body like an arrow darting through the space.

Xiao Longnu gave out an alarmed call, Yang Guo got up, smiled and said, “Gu Gu, you can’t send me out anymore.” As he finished, heavy loud sounds were heard, the two large stones had reached the ground.

Xiao Longnu’s tears and emotions reached their peak, her face looked as if she was going to faint again, she leaned against the stone wall out of breath, after a while she said, “Fine, we’ll die together.” She held Yang Guo’s hand and went back into the heart of the tomb.

Li Mochou and her disciple were searching around for the switch everywhere; they didn’t have the slightest clue and were getting anxious, when the two suddenly appeared. They couldn’t help from being pleased. Li Mochou’s body immediately darted behind the two, blocking their path of escape.

Xiao Longnu coldly said, "Apprentice sister, I'll take you to a place."

Li Mochou didn't reply and thought, "There are traps everywhere in the tomb, don't listen to her. If she's up to something then I won't be able to guard against it."

Xiao Longnu said, "I'm taking you to see Master's tomb, if you don't want to, fine."

Li Mochou said, "There is no need to use Master's name to lie to me." Xiao Longnu chuckled and didn't reply, and walked out of the door. Li Mochou felt that her words seemed like an order, it sounded like no one can disobey, and so the two of them followed, taking care in every step, not daring to be careless. Xiao Longnu held Yang Guo's hand and led the way, she wasn't afraid of being ambushed by Li Mochou, and led the two to the coffin room.

Li Mochou had never been here; she remembered the teachings of her master and felt slightly touched; but then she thought of how her Master was biased and her emotions immediately changed to anger. She didn't kowtow to her Master's coffin and said, "Our master disciple relationship has long been cut; why have you brought me here?"

Xiao Longnu calmly said, "There are two empty coffins, one for me and one for you. I'll let you pick, which one do you want?" She pointed to the two coffins.

Li Mochou was alarmed and shouted, "You dare to make fun of me?" As she finished she threw out a palm towards Xiao Longnu's chest. She didn't know that Xiao Longnu would ignore the palm when she saw it coming. Li Mochou was alarmed and thought, "This palm will kill you." The palm was inches away from Xiao Longnu's chest, when she took the palm back.

Xiao Longnu said calmly, "Apprentice sister, the tomb's 'Dragon Snapping Stones' have been activated!"

Li Mochou's face immediately turned white, although she didn't know much about the tomb's booby traps, she knew that the 'Dragon Snapping Stones' were the tomb's most powerful and last line of defense. Years ago her master had come up against a strong enemy, she almost activated the 'Dragon Snapping Stones', blocking the enemy outside, but eventually she was able to hurt the enemy with the "Soul Freezing Silver Needles" and "Jade Bee Needles". She would never have guessed that her apprentice sister would trap herself in the tomb, alarmed and frightened, her voice quavered, "You have another way out, don't you?"

Xiao Longnu calmly said, "When the 'Dragon Snapping Stones' are set, there is no other way out of the tomb, don't you know this?"

Li Mochou clutched Xiao Longnu's dress and said, "You lie!"

Xiao Longnu didn't move and said, "The 'Jade Heart Manual' that master left is over there, if you want to take a look, go ahead. Guo'er and I are here; if you want to kill us, go ahead. But if you want to leave the tomb alive, then I'm afraid it won't be possible!"

Li Mochou's hand gradually loosened, and she stood still. She saw that Xiao Longnu had a carefree air, and knew that she wasn't lying and said, "Fine, I'll kill you two first!" She threw out a palm at Xiao Longnu. Yang Guo quickly moved in front of Xiao Longnu's body, shielding her and called out, "Kill me first!"

Li Mochou's palm became heavy, when the palm reached Xiao Longnu she wasn't able to exert its power, she looked at Yang Guo with hate and said, "The way you are protecting her, you are willing to die for her, aren't you?"

Yang Guo calmly said, "That's correct!"

Li Mochou's left hand darted out and took the sword from his waist, and pointed it at his throat and said, "I am only going to kill one person. Tell me, is it going to be you or her?" Yang Guo didn't reply, he only looked at Xiao Longnu and smiled. The two of them had already forgotten about life and death; they didn't care who Li Mochou was going to kill.

Li Mochou sighed and said, "Apprentice sister, your oath has been released, and you can leave the mountain now."

Years ago, the ancient Tomb's founder Lin Chaoying recollected her feelings for Wang Chongyang, and was unable to forget him in the end. A broken hearted Lin Chaoying made a rule, those who wanted to be her heir will first have to swear an oath that they will live in the tomb forever, never to leave Mount Zhongnan; but if there was a man who was willing to die for them, then the oath will be released. But the man must not know this oath. Lin Chaoying was positive that there wasn't a man on earth who treated love above all else. The hero Wang Chongyang had become a Taoist, for her there wouldn't be a man who would die willingly for their loved one. If there was such a man, her descendants will not leave the mountain in vain. Li Mochou entered the sect before Xiao Longnu, but because she didn't take the oath, Xiao Longnu became the heir.

Li Mochou saw that Yang Guo was sincere towards Xiao Longnu, and couldn't help becoming envious. She became angry again as she remembered how Lu Zhanyuan rejected her, she frowned as she called out, "Apprentice sister, you are very lucky." She thrust the sword towards Yang Guo's throat. Xiao Longnu saw that she was really going to kill him, now that the time had come, she wasn't able to stop herself from saving him. She waved her left hand; more than ten "Jade Bee Needles" were thrown out.

Li Mochou quickly leapt back to avoid the poisonous needles. Xiao Longnu took Yang Guo's hand and darted to the door, she turned around and said, "Apprentice sister, it doesn't matter whether my oath has been released or not, our four lives will perish in the tomb. I don't want to see your faces, just go and die on your own." She extended her hand to a switch and activated it, the stone door descended, separating the four again.

Xiao Longnu was emotional; it was hard for her to walk. Yang Guo took her to Grandma Sun's room to rest, and took out two jars of Jade Bee honey; he fed her a bottle and drank one himself.

Xiao Longnu quietly sighed and said, "Guo'er, why were you willing to die for me?"

Yang Guo said, "On this earth, only you treat me well, why should I be afraid to die for you?"

Xiao Longnu didn't say anything. Half an hour later she said, "If I'd known earlier, then there was no need for us to return to the tomb and die with them. But if we didn't return, I wouldn't have known that you were willingly to die for me; my oath would not have been released."

Yang Guo said, "Why don't we try to find a way to get out of here?"

Xiao Longnu said, "You know about the tomb, so you should know that that there is no way out for us." Yang Guo sighed.

Xiao Longnu said, "You regret it, don't you?"

Yang Guo said, "No, now I'm with you, outside, there's no one that loves me."

Xiao Longnu had not allowed him to say 'you care about me' in the past, and Yang Guo never mentioned it again; but now

she's had a change of heart, when she heard this she couldn't help but feel touched, and asked, "So why did you sigh?"

Yang Guo said, "I was thinking that if we left the mountain, there are countless fun things to do, and with you by my side, life would be immensely enjoyable."

Xiao Longnu had grown up in the tomb, her heart has always been as cold as ice, her master and Grandma Sun never mentioned the matters of the outside world, so of course she never thought about it. Now Yang Guo mentioned it, she felt her emotions soar, but felt blood rising up into her chest, and tried to circulate her chi to counter it, however she wasn't able to make herself calm, and was frightened. She has never experienced this in her life, and knew that after recovering from her injury, she will not be able to recover her internal energy. She didn't know that this method of suppressing her emotions was against the natural flow of things, being loveless doesn't mean you will be able to do this, only by applying chi strictly can one succeed. She was now past twenty, in her time of danger, a young man was willing to die for her, and she didn't want to reveal her true feelings and wanted to guard against injuring herself further. She tried to suppress her thoughts. She sat on the bed and meditated for a while, but became impatient, and got off the bed and walked around, she was becoming bored. Her steps became quicker and she was dashing around the room. Yang Guo saw that her cheeks were red, and she seemed emotional, he had never seen her like this before, and he was startled. After walking around for a while she sat down heavily on the bed, and looked at Yang Guo, and saw a concerned expression on his face and thought, "Right now I am about to die, so is he. Why should we distinguish ourselves as master and disciple, auntie and nephew? If he comes and hugs me, I won't push him away, and will allow him to hold me tightly."

Yang Guo saw that she had tears in her eyes, she was gasping for breath and assumed that she was having a reaction to her injury again and quickly said, “Gu Gu, are you okay?”

Xiao Longnu softly said, “Guo’er, come here.”

Yang Guo went over to the bedside and Xiao Longnu grasped his hand and lightly brushed her face with it and quietly said, “Guo’er, do you love me?”

Yang Guo felt her face was as hot as a fire; he was frightened and quivered, “Does your chest hurt?”

Xiao Longnu smiled and said, “No, my heart feels extremely comfortable. Guo’er, I’m going to die soon, tell me, do you love me very much?”

Yang Guo said, “Of course, on this earth, you are my only loved one.”

Xiao Longnu said, “If another girl treats you the way I treat you, would you treat them like you treat me?”

Yang Guo said, “Whoever treats me well, I’ll treat them well back.” When he said this he felt the hand that Xiao Longnu held him with quivered, and immediately turned cold as ice, he raised his head and saw that her red face had now turned pale and white, as she was normally.

Yang Guo was alarmed and said, “What did I say wrong?”

Xiao Longnu said, “If you are going to love other girls then its better that you don’t love me.”

Yang Guo smiled and said, “We’ll die in a few days, when will I be able to love other girls? Could it be that I’m going to treat Li Mochou and her disciple well?”

Xiao Longnu smiled captivatingly and said, "I'm really stupid. But I want to hear you swear an oath with your own mouth."

Yang Guo said, "Swear what?"

Xiao Longnu said, "I want you to say, from now on you will only have me in your heart, if there is another girl, I will be allowed to kill you."

Yang Guo smiled and said, "It goes without saying, I will never do this, if I actually did something wrong and don't listen to you, then I deserve to die." He then swore, "Disciple Yang Guo, I will only have Gu Gu in my heart in my lifetime, if my heart changes, there will be no need for Gu Gu to kill me, when I see her face I will kill myself."

Xiao Longnu was delighted and said, "Very good, I can relax now." She held his hand tightly, not letting go. Yang Guo felt warmth returning to her hands.

Xiao Longnu said, "Guo'er, I haven't been kind."

Yang Guo quickly said, "No, you have always been kind."

Xiao Longnu shook her head and said, "I treated you terribly before, at first I kicked you out of the tomb, it was lucky that Grandma Sun made me promise to take care of you. If I didn't turn you away, Grandma Sun would not have died!" When she said this, she couldn't stop tears flowing from her eyes. She had begun to practice martial arts at the age of five, and had never cried since; now she cried heavily, she was in a disturbed state of mind, her bones and joints made cracking noises, and she felt her internal energy draining away from her.

Yang Guo was alarmed and said, "Gu Gu, what's happening? How are you feeling?"

Just as he said this, two 'zha' 'zha' noises were heard from behind and the stone door opened, Li Mochou and Hong Lingbo entered. Once the 'Dragon Snapping Stone' had been set, Li Mochou thought they were going to die anyway so there wasn't any need to be wary of the tomb's booby traps, and boldly dashed throughout the tomb. She managed to go through some rooms before finally arriving at Grandma Sun's room. She knew she must have had extraordinary luck, she managed to avoid the booby traps but she didn't know that the tomb's booby traps were actually designed to repel Jin soldiers, once the large heavy stones had been set, someone must activate the traps to ambush the enemy. Xiao Longnu didn't do this, and so the tomb's booby traps were not armed.

Yang Guo immediately darted across, and blocked Xiao Longnu.

Li Mochou said, "Move out of the way, I have something to say to your master."

Yang Guo was afraid that she was going to harm his master and didn't dare to move and said, "Just say it there."

Li Mochou stared at him for a while and sighed, and said, "There are very few men like you left in this world."

Xiao Longnu got up and asked, "Apprentice sister, is it good or bad that you have described him this way?"

Li Mochou said, "Apprentice sister, you have never left the mountain, you don't know how evil people's hearts can be. Someone who views love and passion as deeply as him, it would be difficult to find another under heaven's skies." She has been hurt by love, her anger and fury was great, and she killed many men in the world who were loving and passionate.

Xiao Longnu was extremely pleased and quietly said, "If that is true, then having him die with me won't make my life be without purpose."

Li Mochou said, "Apprentice sister, who exactly is that person to you? You want to marry him?"

Xiao Longnu said, "No, he is my disciple. He said I treat him extremely well. But whether I have been kind or not, I don't know."

Li Mochou was puzzled, she shook her head and said, "Apprentice sister; let me see your arm." She stretched out her left hand and grasped Xiao Longnu's arm, she lifted her right arm's sleeve and saw on her white skin a red dot, it was the 'shou gong sha' (virginity dot) left by her master. Li Mochou was secretly respectful, "The two of them having a relationship like this in the tomb yet they've kept respect, she is still a pure and untouched virgin." She then rolled up her sleeve, a 'shou gong sha' was on her arm, the sight of two white arms next to each other was captivating. She had no alternative but to be chaste; however her apprentice sister has a lover who was willing to die for her, fortunate and unfortunate. The two women were very different, she couldn't stop herself from sighing, and let go of Xiao Longnu's hand.

Xiao Longnu said, "What have you got to say to me?"

Li Mochou had originally wanted to insult her, saying that she seduced men and had brought the sect to shame, and thereby anger her into revealing the way out of the tomb. But right now she had nothing to say. After a while, she had another idea, and said, "Apprentice sister, I have come to apologize to you."

Xiao Longnu was shocked by this, she knew that her apprentice sister was a very proud woman, never has she

lowered her head to anyone, she didn't know what she wanted. So she calmly replied, "You live your life, and I live mine, we go our own ways, there is no need to apologize for anything."

Li Mochou said, "Apprentice sister listen to me, in my entire life, the happiest time was when I had a lover. There's an old saying 'It's easy to get money and treasures, but it's difficult to find a lover'. There is no need to talk about sister's bitter life. That young man treats you well, you do not lack anything."

Xiao Longnu smiled and said, "Yes, I am very happy. I know that he will never forget about me."

Li Mochou's heart ached and said, "You should leave the mountain and enjoy life. It's a beautiful world; the two of you together will have boundless pleasures."

Xiao Longnu raised her head and quietly said, "Yes, it's just a pity that it is too late now."

Li Mochou said, "Why?"

Xiao Longnu said, "The 'Dragon Snapping Stones' has been set, even if our Master was resurrected, will we not be able to get out of here."

Li Mochou quietly breathed out, blowing through her lips and thought, "you had hoped to take advantage of Xiao Longnu's will to live, and rely on her familiarity with the tomb to find a way out; but in the end it was useless", she became angry and her urge to kill suddenly emerged, her hand twisted slightly and she raised a palm towards Xiao Longnu's head.

Yang Guo was at the side listening to the two of them talking when he suddenly saw Li Mochou attack, alarmed, he automatically lowered his body and threw out two palms, called out, and unleashed the "Toad Stance" that Ouyang

Feng had taught him. This was the kung fu he learned when he was younger, but since he lived in the tomb he did not practice it. But it was etched in his mind, at the most dangerous times he would use it without thinking. Li Mochou's palm had yet to be unleashed, when she suddenly felt an extremely powerful wind pushing her from the side, she quickly sent the palm out to block the attack. Yang Guo had practiced martial arts in the tomb for two years, his internal energy had improved, though it was different to the internal energy of the "Toad Stance", the power behind the push was still great, a thudding sound was made as he sent Li Mochou across the room, and she crashed into the wall causing pain in her back.

Li Mochou was angry and she wiped her palms, in the middle of a battle she fell into someone's trap.

Xiao Longnu knew that Yang Guo's last attack was a lucky hit, if her apprentice sister used her most refined "Divine Serpent Palm", Yang Guo and she would not be able to hold her off. She grabbed Yang Guo's arm and dashed towards the door.

Li Mochou sent out a palm, she didn't guess that while her palm was in midair she would be struck across the left cheek. Although it didn't hurt the sound was crisp, she heard Xiao Longnu call out, "You want to learn the skills of the "Jade Heart Manual"; well here it is!" Li Mochou was struck on the right cheek and she was also startled by what she said. She knew that the "Jade Heart Manual" was extremely powerful, and now she saw Xiao Longnu's palm was extremely swift and quick, the variations mysterious, it was undoubtedly from their sect's skills. But she couldn't see through it or understand the essence of the palm, but knew that the skills just used belonged to the "Jade Heart Manual". She immediately became frightened, and stared as her apprentice sister took Yang Guo's hand and exited the room,

shutting the door. She felt her cheek and thought, "At least she held back, if she used all her strength behind the palms, wouldn't I have died?" She didn't know that Xiao Longnu had yet to complete this kung fu, although the palm stances were refined, the power in them would not hurt anyone.

Yang Guo saw his master strike Li Mochou's cheek and was delighted and said, "Gu Gu, Li Mochou would definitely not be able to beat the manual's skills" before he finished he saw Xiao Longnu shaking and she wasn't able to control it, alarmed, he called out, "Gu Gu, how are you...you" and Xiao Longnu shivered and said, "I'm... I'm cold."

Although the attacks she used were light, she still had to use her internal energy. She had yet to recover her internal energy; this injury was serious. She has always practiced on the Chilled Jade Bed, her foundation was of this nature, now the strength to oppose was gone; an extreme cold penetrated her and her teeth chattered incessantly.

Yang Guo was alarmed and called out, "What should I do?" In this urgent situation he held Xiao Longnu tightly, using his body heat to counter the cold, but after a while he felt she was becoming colder, he himself gradually could not endure it for much longer.

Xiao Longnu felt her internal energy dripping away, and said, "Guo'er, I won't make it, take me to the room with the stone coffins."

Yang Guo was distressed and couldn't say anything, but he thought about how they only had a few days to live anyway, it would be just the same if he died with her now so he quickly replied, "Fine." He carried her to the room and then placed her on one of the lids and lit a candle. In candlelight, and with the backdrop of the stone coffins, Xiao Longnu appeared even weaker.

Xiao Longnu said, "Push one of the lids open and place me in the coffin."

Yang Guo said, "Alright!"

Xiao Longnu couldn't hear any sadness in his voice and was slightly surprised. Yang Guo pushed open one of the stone lids and placed her inside the coffin, and then leaped inside, lying together face to face with her. The two of them together in the coffin didn't allow much space to move.

Xiao Longnu was happy and also puzzled, she asked, "What are you doing?"

Yang Guo said, "Of course I'm going to follow you. I'll let the other two sleep in the other coffin."

Xiao Longnu gave a deep sigh, she was feeling calm and relaxed, her body's coldness wasn't as severe as before. She turned her eyes on Yang Guo and saw his eyes looking at her. Her dress was on top of Yang Guo, she wished that Yang Guo would put his arms around her, but she saw his arms were straight; they were placed in his lap as they should be, afraid that he was going to touch her.

Xiao Longnu was slightly embarrassed, her face turned red, she turned her face away not daring to look at Yang Guo; her mind was enchanted for half an hour when she suddenly saw that something was written on the coffin lid. She looked closely and indeed there were some words:

"The art of the Jade Heart Manual wants to overcome Quanzhen's. But Chongyang, in his life, was inferior no one."

The words were written in heavy ink, the words refined and their form large. The lid was only half open yet it was very clear.

Xiao Longnu gave an 'hmm' sound and said, "What does this mean?"

Yang Guo followed her eyes and saw the words; he pondered and said, "It's written by Wang Chongyang?"

Xiao Longnu said, "It looks like it was written by him. He is saying that our "Jade Heart Manual" is superior to Quanzhen's kung fu, but he is saying that he is not weaker than our Ancestor Grandma, isn't that it?"

Yang Guo laughed and said, "That old Taoist is bullshitting."

Xiao Longnu looked at the words again, and saw that after them, there were many small words, because the words were small and they were lower down on the lid, Xiao Longnu couldn't make it out and said, "Guo'er, get out."

Yang Guo shook his head and said, "I won't leave."

Xiao Longnu smiled and said, "Just get out for a second and you can come back to be with me later." Yang Guo climbed out of the coffin.

Xiao Longnu sat up, and got Yang Guo to lower the candle, and then turned her body around to read the small words. She looked at the words and read each one, after she finished two passages she felt that she had no strength left and the candle fell onto her chest. Yang Guo's hand quickly darted in and pulled her out of the stone coffin and asked, "What is it? What does the writing say?"

Xiao Longnu regained her composure and then sighed again, and said, "After Ancestor Grandma died, Wang Chongyang returned to the tomb."

Yang Guo asked, "Why did he come back?"

Xiao Longnu said, "He came back to pay his respects to our ancestor. He saw that the "Jade Heart Manual" martial art skills left on the ceiling of the training room had defeated all the skills of the Quanzhen sect. The writing left on the lid says that the martial arts that our ancestor defeated were Quanzhen's basic and coarse skills, but compared with the most advanced skills of Quanzhen, the skills of the "Jade Heart Manual" could not defeat them?"

Yang Guo gave an 'humph' sound and said, "Ancestor Grandma is dead, he could say whatever he wants."

Xiao Longnu said, "He also said that in another room he has the techniques to defeat the "Jade Heart Manual", if her descendants were fated to, they will know it when they see it."

Yang Guo was curious and said, "Gu Gu. Let's go take a look."

Xiao Longnu said, "Wang Chongyang stated that the room is below this one. I have lived here for a lifetime and didn't know that such a room exists."

Yang Guo begged, "Gu Gu, let's think of a way to get there."

Xiao Longnu wasn't strict with him anymore, although she was tired, she let him have his way and smiled, and said, "OK!"

They looked all around the room, and in the end they came back to the coffin they had just rested in and she said, "This stone coffin was left by Wang Chongyang. The base opens."

Yang Guo was delighted and said, "Ah, I know, it's the way to that room." He leapt into the coffin and searched around; true enough, he found a hollow for a hand, he pulled up strongly, but nothing happened.

Xiao Longnu said, "First turn to the left and then pull up."

Yang Guo followed the instructions, a 'ka' sound was heard as a stone panel on the base of the coffin responded to the switch; he was delighted and called out, "Let's go!"

Xiao Longnu said, "There's no need to rush, let the old air rush out first and then we can go."

Yang Guo was sitting restlessly, after a while he said, "Gu Gu, can we go now?"

Xiao Longnu sighed and said, "With your impatient character, it must have been hard for you living with me for the last few years." She slowly got up, and picked up a candle, and went down into the coffin with Yang Guo, below it was a series of stone steps that formed a short passageway, after a few turns they did indeed arrived at a stone chamber.

The room was empty, and both of them looked up at the ceiling, it was covered with carvings and symbols; on the far right were written the words "Nine Yin Manual".

The two of them didn't know the "Nine Yin Manual" was martial arts at its highest level; they looked at it for a while and felt that it was hard to explain.

Xiao Longnu said, "Even if that kung fu is unbeatable, it is of no use to us."

Yang Guo sighed and was about to lower his head when something got his eye in the southwestern corner, a picture, it had nothing to do with martial arts, he looked closer and saw it looked like a map and asked, "What's that?"

Xiao Longnu followed his finger and stared at it for a while, her body was like a corpse, not moving an inch. After a long while, she was still like statue, lost in thought as she examined the map closely. Yang Guo was frightened and tugged her sleeve, and asked, "Gu Gu, what is it?"

Xiao Longnu gave a moan, and suddenly fell into his chest and started crying.

Yang Guo softly said, "Your body hurts again, isn't it?"

Xiao Longnu said, "No, it's not that." After half an hour she said, "We can escape from here."

Yang Guo was delighted and leapt up, and called out, "Really?"

Xiao Longnu nodded her head and quietly said, "That map reveals the secret passage out of here." She was familiar with the layout of the tomb, one look and she understood the map.

Yang Guo was ecstatic and said, "That's great! Why are you crying?"

Xiao Longnu contained her tears and smiled, and said, "I never used to fear death, I was going to live in the tomb forever, die early, die late, what difference would it make? However in the last few days I've felt the urge to go and see the outside world. Guo'er, I'm afraid and happy."

Yang Guo tugged her hand and said, "Gu Gu, when we go outside together, I'll pick flowers for you to wear, and I'll catch crickets for you to play with, okay?"

Although he has grown up, all his thoughts were either amusing or about things that children play and do. Xiao Longnu had never played with anyone, she listened quietly to what he said, and thought, "It'll be better if we leave as soon as possible." But her body was sore, and had no strength, she wasn't able to endure anymore and slowly rested on Yang Guo's shoulder. Yang Guo talked for a while and didn't hear her reply so he turned his head around to take a look, her eyes were closed, her breathing slow, she

had fallen into a deep sleep. He was feeling tranquil; he was tired as well and eventually also fell asleep.

After a long while, he felt his back ached; someone had sealed the 'Centre' (zhong shu) pressure point on his back. He woke up alarmed, and wanted to jump up but someone was holding his neck down and preventing him from moving. He turned his head and saw Li Mochou and her disciple standing there laughing; his master also had her pressure points sealed. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu didn't have the Jianghu experience of guarding yourself; in their delight, they had forgotten to go back up and close the coffin lid. Li Mochou had discovered that there was a room below the coffin and succeeded in her ambush.

Li Mochou chuckled and said, "Good, this is such a comfortable place here, and the two of you escaped to enjoy such comfort. Apprentice sister; think long and hard, you might be able to think of a way out of here."

Xiao Longnu said, "Even if I knew, I wouldn't tell you."

Li Mochou had believed what she said before, once the 'Dragon Snapping Stones' were set, there was no way out; but judging from the tone in her last two sentences, it sounded like she did know the way out of here. When Li Mochou heard this she was delighted, and said, "Kind apprentice sister, if you take us out of here, I will never bother you again."

Xiao Longnu said, "You came here by yourself, you can find a way out by yourself, why do you need me to lead you out."

Li Mochou knew that her apprentice sister was tough to break, even in the days when master was still here, she still had to be wary of her, using force would be of no use. But right now it is a matter of life and death; she still needed to try to force it out of her some way so she sealed their

'Charging Sky' (tian tu) pressure points on their necks, and sealed their 'Fifth Centre' (wu shu) pressure point on the abdomen. The 'Charging Sky' pressure point was where the body holds together its yin, the main blood vessels return here, the 'Fifth Centre' pressure point is where the 'little yin' vessels return. Li Mochou used the pressure point skills of the Ancient Tomb sect. She knew that in not too long, their body would start to become numb and the pain hard to endure, they would have to reveal the secret.

Xiao Longnu closed her eyes and ignored it. Yang Guo called out, "If we knew the way out, then why didn't we escape instead of staying here?"

Li Mochou laughed and said, "You have just revealed that you know the way out, don't deny it. Of course she would know that the tomb has to have a secret passage out, when you two had rested fully, you would have got out. Apprentice sister, are you going to tell me?"

Xiao Longnu quietly said, "When you get out, all you are going to think about is how to kill people, what good is having you leaving this place?"

Li Mochou folded her arms and sat to one side, she chuckled and did not reply.

Yang Guo couldn't endure anymore and said, "Hey, Li Mochou, the pressure point sealing techniques that Ancestor Grandma passed down was supposed to be used on the enemy, why are you using it against us? You are using it to harm your apprentice sister, how can you face Ancestor Grandma?"

Li Mochou laughed and said, "You are calling me Li Mochou, we are not old friends."

Yang Guo whispered into Xiao Longnu's ear and said, "Don't reveal the secret path out, if she doesn't find out, she won't kill us; once she finds out she will kill us immediately."

Xiao Longnu said, "Ah, you are correct, I didn't think of that. I wasn't planning on telling her anyway." She was lying on the floor, she opened her eyes and saw the map and thought, "It would be awful if apprentice sister finds out about the map. I mustn't look at it in case I draw her attention."

Years ago, Wang Chongyang had known that Lin Chaoying had left the earth, and reminisced about her; his debts to her were immeasurable, but people and ghosts are worlds apart. He wasn't able to console the pain he had in his heart so he secretly entered the tomb. He avoided her maid, and stared at the things that his old friend left, and cried, and then took a look around the tomb he designed. He saw the painting that Lin Chaoying drew, and saw the markings left by her in the two training rooms. He saw the skills of the "Jade Heart Manual" were refined and ingenious, every stance was the "Black Star" to Quanzhen's martial arts, he couldn't stop his face from turning grey and he left the tomb.

He retreated deep into the mountains and built a thatched hut. He didn't leave it for three years, studying a way to break the skills of the "Jade Heart Manual"; although there were a few successes, he wasn't able to develop a complete set of skills to counter it. He was down heartened, and respected Lin Chaoying's intelligence even more, he admitted defeat and stopped researching.

Ten or so years later, he managed to get his hands on the extraordinary "Nine Yin Manual" after the Mount Hua tournament. He made his mind up, he wasn't going to learn the skills within the manual, but curiosity defeated him, and he couldn't refrain from taking a look.

His martial arts at that time was the world's greatest, the skills in the "Nine Yin Manual" were all profound and refined, after a glance and pondering for ten days, he understood, he laughed out loud to the sky, and returned to the tomb, and left the main aspects of the "Nine Yin Manual" on the ceiling in the most hidden room in the tomb, and the stances that would defeat the "Jade Heart Manual". He studied the tomb's circumstances, and assumed that the heirs of Lin Chaoying would use the empty coffin. They would only use it when they were about to die and waiting for death, and at that time then they would know that the founder of the Quanzhen sect had never lost to anyone in his life. He left words on the lid of the coffin, telling the descendants of Lin Chaoying before they died, that the martial arts of the founder of the Quanzhen sect would not be defeated by the skills of the "Jade Heart Manual".

At that time, he was just impulsive and proud, he didn't mean to leave the "Nine Yin Manual" behind in the world, and assumed that when the descendants of Lin Chaoying saw the "Nine Yin Manual", they would be at their last breath and could only take the secret to the grave with them.

Wang Chongyang and Lin Chaoying were both gifted in martial arts, and formed a heavenly pair. Between the two, there wasn't a third person that interfered with the relationship; also they didn't have any matters to resolve with relatives, apprentice brother, sister or enemies. Before Wang Chongyang entered the priesthood, he concentrated on fighting the Jin, and had no time for relationships. When he lost the war and retreated to the tomb, it was Lin Chaoying who came and comforted him, she was kind and touching, there wasn't any reason for them not to be together. But from love it turned to hate, one became a Taoist; the other lived until death in the stone tomb. The actual reasons behind this, Qiu Chuji and the others did not know, it was difficult for Wang and Lin to explain themselves,

they could only use the words 'not meant to be' to label what happened. 'Not meant to be' was the result and not the reason for their falling out.

Both of them were highly skilled and very proud; each assumed they were the higher. Every time the seeds of love were about to sprout, they struggled over their martial arts, neither backing down, even until death. Lin Chaoying invented the "Jade Heart Manual" to defeat the skill of the Quanzhen. Wang Chongyang didn't admit defeat and so left the "Nine Yin Manual" in the tomb. Wang Chongyang thought about how Lin Chaoying invented the "Jade Heart Manual" by herself, and he himself relied on a book written by someone else, after their exchange, he yielded. After that he always warned his students to allow for times when they will be subdued, and to learn the Taoist ways well.

The map on the ceiling was left there when the tomb was first created, just in case the Jin surrounded the tomb, they would still have a way to escape. Even Lin Chaoying did not know about this passageway. Lin Chaoying only knew that once the 'Dragon Snapping Stones' have been set, they will perish with the enemy, she didn't know that when Wang Chongyang designed the tomb, he had a strong will to retake the central plains, how could he allow one defeat to stop him? Later on when Wang Chongyang gave up the tomb to Lin Chaoying, he was afraid that Lin Chaoying would look down on him for leaving a way to save his life if he had to use the 'Dragon Snapping Stones'. He would lose his manly air, so he didn't tell her about it out of pride.

Xiao Longnu didn't dare to look at the map, her eyes looked at another corner, and the words "Unsealing Pressure Points Technique" caught her eye. She shivered, and looked at the words and was delighted, almost too delighted in fact as she almost forgot to hide her joy by calling out. The technique shows how to unseal one's pressure points, if one fire

deviates when refining their kung fu, and the pressure points are sealed, they could use this technique to unseal it themselves. Those who practiced the “Nine Yin Manual” would have reached an extremely high standard of martial arts, it will be very rare for them to have their pressure points sealed by someone else; this technique was devised to quell one’s inner demons. When one cultivates highly advanced skill, one’s thoughts should be pure and clear. If your concentration is suddenly disturbed by random thoughts or anxiety (inner demons) the chances are high that you’ll die. In Xiao Longnu’s present situation, it was a life saving technique.

She thought, “If I’m able to unseal my vessels, but can’t defeat my apprentice sister, then it will of no use.” She then searched the writings on the ceilings, trying to search for a skill that she can use immediately, one that will, as soon as she uses it, allow her to subdue Li Mochou. After a quick glance she could see that each skill was hard and complicated, even the easiest one will take ten of days to learn. She didn’t dare to any more; she was afraid that Li Mochou will follow her eyes, look above, and discover the ceiling’s map and “Nine Yin Manual”.

She heard Yang Guo calling and shouting, arguing with Li Mochou. It was fortunate, her careful apprentice sister was now not taking any notice of her, she suddenly thought of a plan. She turned her head and memorized the “Nine Yin Manual’s Unsealing Pressure Point Technique” and “Air Closure Technique” (bi qi mi jue) sections, she moved her lips over Yang Guo’s ear and quietly taught him. Yang Guo immediately understood.

Xiao Longnu whispered, “First unseal your pressure points.”

Yang Guo was afraid that Li Mochou and her disciple would find out, so he loudly called out and talked rubbish, “Ai ya,

Martial Uncle Li, you are too ruthless, you are not respecting Ancestor Grandma, you further do not respect Ancestor Grandma's grandma, grandma's great grandma."

The two followed the instructions of the "Unsealing Pressure Point Technique" left by Wang Chongyang. The two have a good foundation, and in just a short while they managed to unseal their two pressure points. On the outside the two appeared still, but Li Mochou felt something was wrong and shouted, "What are you doing?" and walked up to them. Xiao Longnu quickly got up and threw out a palm, lightly striking her shoulder, it was the more advanced skills of the "Jade Heart Manual". Li Mochou could never have guessed in a million years that she had the ability to unseal her pressure points and was alarmed, and quickly jumped back.

Xiao Longnu said, "Apprentice sister, do you want to leave?"

Li Mochou was happy when she heard this, her kung fu seemed high, her intelligence rarely seen, right now she had been made a fool of and had been struck by the palms of a girl who has never seen the outside world. She couldn't prevent herself from getting furious, but she thought that she must hold her temper for the time being, first leave the tomb and then it still wouldn't be too late to finish them off. Although her stances were strange, there was no power behind them. It wasn't that she held back but because she didn't have internal energy; this meant that she wasn't anything special. Li Mochou laughed and said, "That's a good apprentice sister, I've already apologized, take us out of here."

Yang Guo thought this would be a good chance to get in between the relationship of Li Mochou and Hong Lingbo and said, "Gu Gu said that she is only able to take one of you out, is it going to be you or your disciple?"

Li Mochou said, "You little scum, shut your mouth."

Xiao Longnu didn't know what Yang Guo meant but protected him and said, "That's right, I can only take one person, I can't take anymore."

Yang Guo laughed and said, "Martial Uncle, why don't you let apprentice sister Hong leave, you are older than her, you've lived enough. She's also prettier than you."

Though Li Mochou was older than Hong Lingbo, she was more beautiful. When she heard this she became angrier, but didn't make a sound.

Yang Guo said, "Fine! We're going! Gu Gu leads the way, I'm second, the last one will not be able to get out."

Xiao Longnu now knew what he meant and smiled; she held Yang Guo's hand and left the stone chamber. Li Mochou and Hong Lingbo moved forward at the same time and both reached the door; they were afraid that Xiao Longnu was going to switch on a trap and leave the last person there in the tomb.

Li Mochou angrily said, "Trying to take the place from me?" Her left hand shot out, wanting to strike Hong Lingbo on the shoulders. Hong Lingbo knew that her master was ruthless; if she didn't stop she would die violently at the hands of her master. She knew she had to let her master go first; she was both angry and frightened.

Li Mochou followed the back of Yang Guo tightly, making sure she was always within one step of him; she felt Xiao Longnu turning west and winding east, the path was heading lower. At the same time she felt her feet getting damp, she knew that they would leave the tomb soon but she glanced up and saw there were branches in the path everywhere. After a while, the path suddenly became steep, almost like a straight drop, if the four of them didn't have such good martial arts, they would have slipped long ago.

Li Mochou thought, "Mount Zhongnan is not high, if we keep going like this we'll be at the foot of the mountain, could it be that we are in the depths of the mountain?"

After dropping for an hour the path became level, the dampness in the air became stronger, and eventually they could hear running water. Soon they were in water up to their ankles. As they went further, the water grew deeper, from the legs to the stomach, and gradually to the chest.

Xiao Longnu quietly asked Yang Guo, "Do you remember and understand the "Air Closure Technique"?"

Yang Guo quietly replied, "I remember."

Xiao Longnu said, "In a minute remember to lock your air, and don't take in any water."

Yang Guo said, "Yes, Gu Gu, you have to be careful yourself." Xiao Longnu nodded.

While they were speaking the water had reached their throats. Li Mochou was secretly alarmed, and called out, "Apprentice sister, do you know how to swim under water?"

Xiao Longnu said, "I've lived in the tomb for all my life; how would I know how to swim underwater?"

Li Mochou became slightly more relaxed, she took another step, and felt nothing was there, water seeped into her mouth. She was alarmed and quickly leapt back, but she saw Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo dive underwater. At this stage, even if it was a mountain of knives or an ocean of swords she would still have to enter. She felt her clothes tighten, her dress was grasped by Hong Lingbo; she quickly attacked behind her, the attack wasn't light but she wasn't able to push her away. Right now the water was making a terrific noise, as though it was flowing down into the ground, the sound was frightening. Li Mochou and Hong Lingbo didn't

know how to swim, they couldn't stand and floated up. Li Mochou was a skilled fighter, but right now she was alarmed and flustered, she extended her arms and legs and madly thrashed. In the midst of this she felt something so she used her strength to hold on; it was Yang Guo's left arm. Yang Guo was sealing his air, and was following Xiao Longnu on the floor of the water passage walking forward step by step. He was grabbed suddenly by Li Mochou and quickly tried to free himself; but Li Mochou was holding on tightly, how could she let go? Water rushed into her mouth and nose, but even when she passed out she was still holding on. Yang Guo tried a few times but was unable to pry her off; he was afraid that he was exerting too much energy and will start swallowing water, so he left her alone.

The four of them moved on for a while, then Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo couldn't hold their breath any longer and swallowed some water. Luckily the water slowed and the ground began to rise; not long after, they managed to get their heads above the water. After the time it takes for an incense stick to be burned, the path became brighter, and they exited through a cave. The two were exhausted and first circulated their chi to get rid of the water they swallowed, and then lay on the ground, recovering their breath.

Li Mochou was still holding onto Yang Guo tightly and Hong Lingbo onto her. Yang Guo loosened her fingers and took her hands off him. Xiao Longnu first sealed the pressure points on their shoulders, and then placed them on a rock, and let the water seep out of them slowly. After a while, Li Mochou spluttered and gave a few 'ah' sounds, she'd regained consciousness first and she saw the sun in her eyes. She was actually seeing daylight again. She remembered being trapped in the tomb and the danger and fear of diving under the water. Though her body was aching and numb, she felt much better than before. Not too long later, Hong Lingbo slowly woke up.

Xiao Longnu said, "Apprentice sister, you can go now!"

The arms of Li Mochou and her disciple were both paralyzed but the lower body could move freely; they got up, looked at each other and walked away.

Yang Guo took a look around, and saw they were in a shaded area, flowers were everywhere, he was delighted and said, "Gu Gu, isn't this nice?" Xiao Longnu nodded and smiled. The two remembered the events of the past few days; it really was the complete opposite. There wasn't anyone around; the cave was at the foot of Mount Zhongnan in a rare piece of uncultivated land. That night, the two slept under the shelter of a tree on the grass.

They woke up in the morning, Yang Guo said they could now go out and play, but Xiao Longnu has never seen the outside world before, and didn't know what it was like, she was frightened and said, "No, we'll first recover and then we'll finish learning the "Jade Heart Manual"."

Yang Guo slapped his head and said, "I'm so dumb! I forgot about your injuries." He thought again about how it would be inconvenient to take off their clothes here and practice, so he first helped Xiao Longnu to cure her injuries. Within two weeks, Xiao Longnu had recovered.

Under a large pine tree, they built two thatch huts for shelter. The roof was filled with purple rattan. Yang Guo liked the scent of flowers, so in front of his hut he planted roses, jasmine and the like. Xiao Longnu however liked simple decorations, and said the scent of the pine needles was better than a flower's, and so there wasn't anything in her hut, and surrounding it was just open space and grass.

The two of them slept in the day and practiced at night. In a few months, Xiao Longnu had completed learning the "Jade Heart Manual". A month or so later, Yang Guo also finished.

The two had completed everything and had nothing to do, and so Yang Guo mentioned going out into the world again.

Xiao Longnu felt the way of life now was great, nothing in the world could compare to it. But then she thought about how difficult it would be for Yang Guo's character to stay here, and so said, "Guo'er, our kung fu is now much better than before, but how are they compared to your Auntie and Uncle Guo?"

Yang Guo said, "We are still no where near them."

Xiao Longnu said, "Your Uncle Guo passes on his skills to his daughter, and the Wu brothers, if we meet them, then we'll have to suffer them."

When he heard this Yang Guo leaped up and angrily said, "If they bully me again, how will I be able to just let them?"

Xiao Longnu calmly said, "You can't beat them, it'll just be pointless."

Yang Guo said, "You can help me."

Xiao Longnu said, "If I can't beat your Uncle Guo, then it's no use."

Yang Guo lowered his head and tried to think of a plan. After a while he said, "Out of respect for Uncle Guo, I won't start trouble with them."

Xiao Longnu thought, "He has lived in the tomb for two years and practiced the Ancient Tomb's kung fu, his temper has mellowed."

Actually, when Yang Guo became older, he understood a lot of things; he knew that the way Guo Jing treated him was out of love and caring, he was touched. Now he was willing to back down, and besides, he didn't really have any serious

feuds with Guo Fu and the Wu brothers. All they had was a little argument over crickets when they were younger, as time passed his feelings about this went away.

Xiao Longnu said, "It's good that you won't have fights and arguments with them. But according to you, even if you concede to others, others will still come and bully you; if we don't learn the kung fu that Wang Chongyang left, when we meet skilled enemies, we won't be able to fight them off."

Yang Guo knew that she didn't want leave this peaceful place, and he couldn't bear to go against her wishes and said, "Gu Gu, I'll listen to you, from tomorrow onwards, we'll begin practicing the "Nine Yin Manual".

As a result of this conversation, the two lived in the valley for another year. The two went back into the tomb via the secret passage, and learned the text of the "Nine Yin Manual". When they were sure they remembered every single word, they left and practiced outside. Within the year, their internal and external skills improved in every aspect. But the markings that were left in the tomb by Wang Chongyang were only the parts which could defeat the "Jade Heart Manual" and consisted only a small part of the "Nine Yin Manual", compared with what they know and what Guo Jing and Huang Rong knew, it was much inferior, but now, they weren't the only two that knew it.

One day after finishing practicing their martial arts, both of them felt that they had made great improvements. Yang Guo jumped up and down in delight, while Xiao Longnu was worried and unhappy. Yang Guo kept on telling jokes to help break her boredom. Yang Guo knew that they now have learned all the kung fu that Wang Chongyang left in the tomb. If they wanted to learn it to its highest level, one didn't know how many years it would take, but they grasped the essence and ideas behind the skills. All they needed to do

now is to keep practicing and the skills will become more refined. He knew that Xiao Longnu did not want to leave the mountain, but there wasn't anything to stop them now, he was troubled and said, "Gu Gu, if you don't want to leave, then we'll stay here forever."

Xiao Longnu delightedly said, "Good" but as she said this she stopped, she knew that Yang Guo didn't want to stay, she wouldn't live happily, she quietly said, "We'll talk about this tomorrow." She didn't eat supper, and returned to her hut and slept.

Yang Guo sat down on the grass and stared, up until there were stars in the sky, and then retired to his hut. He slept until the middle of the night, when he heard wind sounds, the sounds were urgent, something was wrong. He woke up alarmed, and listened; it was the sound of fists and palms. He quickly darted out of his hut, and went outside of his master's hut and quietly said, "Gu Gu, can you hear?"

Right then, the sounds of the winds were louder, Xiao Longnu would definitely hear it but there was no reply from the hut. Yang Guo called out twice, and then entered, the room was empty; his master was not here. He became even more alarmed, and searched for the origins of the wind sounds. He ran for about a hundred feet, he didn't see anyone but from the wind sounds, he knew one of them was his master, but the opponent's wind from their palms were heavy and severe, their kung fu level would be above his master's.

Yang Guo dashed over, in the moonlight he saw Xiao Longnu and a strongly built person hovering around, fighting frantically. Although Xiao Longnu was swift and quick, the opponent's skills were powerful and strong; under the force of those palms, Xiao Longnu had to use all her strength to avoid them.

Yang Guo was startled and said, "Master, I'm here!"

The two of them came down, and Yang Guo was at their sides and faced that person, he was happily surprised, the person had a beard, his limbs like lances, his long face like a thorn, it was his Godfather Ouyang Feng.

But he saw him standing there like a mountain, throwing out palms at Xiao Longnu, she could only dodge them, she didn't dare to meet their power.

Yang Guo called out, "We all know each other, there's no need to fight."

Xiao Longnu was startled and thought how could this madman be a friend of theirs, while she was thinking she slowed down. Ouyang Feng threw out a palm, a strong force threw itself at her, it was extremely powerful. Yang Guo was startled and quickly leapt in front of them only to see Xiao Longnu's left palm meeting Ouyang Feng's right, he knew that his Master's internal energy couldn't compare with his Godfather, she will suffer a serious internal energy in a short while, so he stretched out his five fingers and stroked Ouyang Feng's elbow lightly, it was the newly learnt skill from the "Nine Yin Manual" "Hand Waves Five Strings" (shou hui wu xian). Though he wasn't too familiar with this skill, he knew the aspects of this attack, Ouyang Feng's arm became numb, his body's strength dispersed.

Xiao Longnu saw a chance to gain victory, she felt the enemy had become weak and immediately attacked, in a flash Ouyang Feng had become completely defenseless, just a light attack would have seriously hurt him.

Yang Guo intercepted his Master's palm, and sandwiched himself between the two, he smiled and said, "Watch it you two, we're friends." Ouyang Feng had not recognized him, he just saw that this young man was extremely skilled and angrily said, "Who are you? What friends?"

Yang Guo knew he was mad and disturbed and was afraid he would forget who Yang Guo was so he loudly called out, "Father...it's me, I'm your son." His words were filled with emotion. Ouyang Feng stood still, he took his head and studied his face under the moonlight, it was the son he has been searching for the past few years, but because he had grown tall, and his martial arts were high, it was hard for him to recognize him. He held Yang Guo and called out, "Son, I've endured many hardships searching for you!" The two held each other tightly, both of them producing tears.

Xiao Longnu has always been cold and detached, she knew that the only person in the world whose emotions towards her were as hot as fire was Yang Guo, but right now, when he saw Ouyang Feng, he was also like this. She feared leaving the mountain and sat aside pondering.

After Ouyang Feng and Yang Guo separated at the Iron Spear Temple, he hid under the large bell; Ke Zhen'E couldn't get at him. He meditated with his divine skills to cure his internal injuries, after seven days and nights his internal energy had recovered. But the external injuries that he received from Ke Zhen'E were not minor; he wasn't able to recover from them in such a short time. When he left the large bell, he went to an inn and rested his wounds for twenty days. When his wounds were healed, he went and looked for Yang Guo. But a month had passed, the world is a large place, how could he find him? He thought, "The child is most probably on Peach Blossom Island." He got a small boat and sailed to the island. He didn't dare to approach during the day, so at night he anchored in a bay behind a mountain. He knew he wasn't a match for Guo Jing and Huang Rong, plus he didn't know that Huang Yaoshi wasn't on the island. Even if his skills were twice as good, he wouldn't be able to fight all three of them. During the day he hid in a cave on a wild piece of land, and patrolled at night. The layout of the island was ingenious; he didn't dare run around where ever he pleased. Over the year,

he was extremely cautious, in the light of day he didn't dare to take one step out of the cave, no one discovered him. One night, after his one meeting with Yang Guo, he heard the Wu brothers chatting and then he knew that Guo Jing had sent Yang Guo to the Quanzhen sect to learn martial arts. Ouyang Feng was pleased, he stole a boat and left the island, and rushed to Chongyang Palace. But he didn't know about the incident between Yang Guo and the Quanzhen sect, or that he was now in the Tomb of the Living Dead. Quanzhen was ashamed of what happened, no one talked about this matter, Ouyang Feng couldn't get any news from them. He searched for miles and miles around Mount Zhongnan, but he didn't know that Yang Guo was below ground so of course he couldn't find him.

Tonight by chance, he was walking by the valley when he saw a girl dressed in white with folded arms, sighing and looking at the moon.

Ouyang Feng asked madly, "Hey, where's my son? Have you seen him?"

Xiao Longnu glanced at him, then ignored him. Ouyang Feng went over to her and grabbed her arm, and shouted, "Where's my son?"

Xiao Longnu felt that his hands were extremely powerful, she had never met someone with such high skills, even the skilled fighters of Quanzhen could not compare. She was startled and used her a little capturing hand kung fu to escape. Ouyang Feng's grab was a certainty but he could not have guessed the opponent could just lightly brush him off; he didn't ask who she was and attacked. That's how the two started their fight.

The two of them told each other what had happened to them. Ouyang Feng was half clear and half confused, he wasn't able to explain clearly what had happened in the past, and

didn't understand much of what Yang Guo said. But when he mentioned that in the past few years he has been learning martial arts from Xiao Longnu, Ouyang Feng loudly said, "Her kung fu is not as good as mine. Why are you learning from her? Let me teach you." Xiao Longnu didn't want to argue with him, she smiled calmly and went off to the side by herself.

Yang Guo felt this wasn't polite and said, "Father, Master has treated me extremely well."

Ouyang Feng was jealous and said, "So she's good and I'm not?"

Yang Guo smiled and said, "You are good as well. On this earth, only you two treat me well."

Ouyang Feng's words didn't make sense, but Yang Guo knew that he had suffered many hardships in the past few years searching for him.

Ouyang Feng held his hand, he laughed foolishly and after a while he said, "Your kung fu is not bad, it's a pity that you don't know the world's two most powerful martial arts."

Yang Guo said, "What are they?"

Ouyang Feng's eyebrows rose and he shouted, "You are a martial artist yet you don't know the world's two most powerful skills. What's the point of having her for a master?"

Yang Guo saw that he was pleased and angry; he was concerned about him and thought, "Father's illness is serious, when will he be able to recover from it?"

Ouyang Feng laughed loudly and said, "Hmm, let father teach you. The two most powerful skills are, one, the "Toad Stance", two, "Nine Yin Manual". I'll first teach you the

foundation of the “Toad Stance”. He then recited the formulae for it.”

Yang Guo smiled and said, “You’ve taught me before, don’t you remember?”

Ouyang Feng scratched his head and said, “So you’ve already learned it, that’s great. Show it to me.”

Since Yang Guo entered the Ancient Tomb sect, he hasn’t practiced the strange skill that Ouyang Feng taught him; when he heard what he said, he immediately did as he was told. He had practiced it when he was on Peach Blossom Island, now with the advanced internal energy he has developed; he was able to demonstrate it spectacularly.

Ouyang Feng laughed and said, “Good! Good! Even though the stances don’t match, it’s better than nothing. I’ll teach you the rest of it now.” He waved his hands and bent his legs, and started reciting non stop, he didn’t care if Yang Guo remembered it or not, he taught a section of “Toad Stance”, and then taught him a section of the “Contrary Nine Yin Manual” (the deliberately flawed version of the Nine Yin Manual). Yang Guo listened for half an hour, and felt that the formulae’s ingenuity was boundless, but it was complicated and strange, how would he be able to understand in just a short while of time?

Ouyang Feng continued for a while when he caught a glimpse of Xiao Longnu from the corner of his eye, and called out, “Ah, it’s no good, I don’t want your baby Master to secretly listening in on us.” He went over to Xiao Longnu and said, “Hey, little girl, I’m teaching my son kung fu, don’t secretly listen in.”

Xiao Longnu said, “What’s so good about your kung fu? Who wants to steal it?”

Ouyang Feng thought for a while, and said, "Fine, just go far away."

Xiao Longnu was leaning against a tree and calmly said, "Why do I want to listen? If I want to go, I'll go, if I don't want to go, I won't."

Ouyang Feng was angry, his eyebrows raised and he stretched out his hand to grab her face, but Xiao Longnu pretended she didn't see and ignored him.

Yang Guo called out, "Father, don't disrespect my Master."

Ouyang Feng took his hand back and said, "Fine, fine, we are going to a far away place, are you going to follow us and listen in?"

Xiao Longnu thought that Guo'er's Godfather was extremely impolite; she didn't want anything to do with him and turned around without a reply. She didn't guess that her back would suddenly become numb, Ouyang Feng had stretched out his arm and sealed a pressure point on her back, he was uncannily fast, plus Xiao Longnu wasn't aware, by the time she felt something was wrong and put her guard up, it was too late, her whole body was paralyzed. Ouyang Feng then sealed another pressure point on her waist, he smiled and said, "Little girl, don't be anxious, after I've completely taught my son kung fu, I'll come back and release you." He then laughed loudly and walked away.

Yang Guo was memorizing the formulae of the "Toad Stance" and the "Nine Yin Manual", and felt that some of it was unclear and some a complete mess, but there were many ingenious points within it so he didn't suspect anything was wrong. He pondered deeply; he didn't know what was happening to Xiao Longnu.

Ouyang Feng came over and took his hand, and said, "We'll go to another place so your Master can't hear."

Yang Guo wondered why Xiao Longnu would try to listen; even if you were trying to teach it to her she wouldn't learn it. But his godfather's mind was confused and disturbed, there wasn't a need to argue with him and so he let him have his way and went with him.

Xiao Longnu was laying paralyzed on the ground, she was angry but also wanted to laugh, thinking that although her skills were refined, she has little experience in fighting real enemies. She was ambushed by Li Mochou and now her pressure points had been sealed by a crazy man; so she utilized her "Nine Yin Manual" skills, and tried to unseal the pressure points herself, she breathed in deeply to clear her pressure points. How could it be that the two pressure points did not show any sign of unsealing, but instead they became even more sore and numb, she couldn't stop herself from being startled. Ouyang Feng's pressure point skill was from the "Contrary Nine Yin Manual", and she used the "Nine Yin" skills that Wang Chongyang had left in the tomb. Instead of unsealing them it became worse. She tried a few more times, but the pain just got worse so she didn't dare to try it again and thought that after that madman has taught his kung fu, he will come back and unseal the pressure points. She thought there was no need to rush, she looked up at the sky and looked at the stars, and soon closed her eyes and fell asleep.

After a while she felt something brushing against her eyes, she could see things as clearly at night as if it were in the day, but now she couldn't see a thing. Someone had blindfolded her eyes, and at the same time she felt someone's arm holding her. When that person first held her, they were extremely afraid, but afterwards they gradually became more daring and didn't show any restraint.

Xiao Longnu was extremely frightened; she wanted to open her mouth and call out, but her mouth and tongue wouldn't move. She felt that person's mouth was coming close and kissed her on the cheek. She first thought that it was Ouyang Feng who was trying to rape her, but she felt this person's face was smooth; it was not Ouyang Feng's face which was bearded. Her heart shook, and her fear gradually disappeared, a passionate desire began to appear; she thought that it was Yang Guo who had come back to her. She felt his hands were beginning to become more and more improper, slowly taking her clothes off. Xiao Longnu had no way to move, and could only let him do as he pleased, she couldn't help herself from being embarrassed and surprised.

Ouyang Feng saw that Yang Guo was extremely clever, although he wasn't able to understand the formulae he passed on completely, he memorized it all. He was pleased and he spoke until the sky became bright before he had explained all the main aspects of the two skills. Yang Guo memorized it all and after a while said, "I have also learned 'Nine Yin' kung fu, but it is very different to your version. But what is the reason?"

Ouyang Feng said, "Rubbish, apart from this one, what other 'Nine Yin Manual' is there?"

Yang Guo said, "Take for example the method to learning the 'Changing Muscle Forging Bone' technique, you said the third step was air and blood must flow contrarily, surging through 'Sky Pillar' (tian zhu) point. My Master said, first protect the 'dan tian' and then surge through the 'Sealing Door' (zhang men) point."

Ouyang Feng said, "No, it's not correct, wait" he did what Yang Guo told him, and felt the way his internal energy was circulating was completely different. He didn't know that the manual that Guo Jing wrote out for him had been changed;

he couldn't help but go mad. He murmured to himself, "Why? Am I wrong or is your baby Master wrong? How is there such a thing?"

Yang Guo saw that his eyes stared straight, he looked like he was in a trance, he called him several times but there was no reply. He was afraid that Ouyang Feng was going to go mad again and was deeply concerned. He suddenly heard a noise from a tree behind him, an image appeared; within the thickets of flowers he saw the corner of an apricot yellow Taoist gown. This place was secluded, why would someone be here? The person was sneaking around, showing they weren't up to any good; he couldn't help but get suspicious, and chased after him. The person's steps were fast; from behind it appeared to be a Taoist.

Yang Guo called out, "Hey, who are you? What are you doing here?" He utilized his lightness kung fu and chased the person down.

When the Taoist heard the shouts he increased his speed; Yang Guo also increased his slightly, his body like an arrow shooting forward and he grabbed the Taoist's shoulder. He turned him around and saw that it was Quanzhen's Yin Zhiping. Yang Guo saw that his gown was untidy, his face was red for a while and then white for a while, he called out, "What are you doing here?"

Yin Zhiping was the head of the third generation students of Quanzhen, his martial arts were high. Usually he has an air about him, but for whatever reason now, his face was flustered and he couldn't speak a word. Yang Guo saw that he was extremely frightened, and remembered that day when he cut off his fingers and swore an oath. He wasn't a bad person and so he loosened his hand and let him go. He said, "Since it's nothing, go!" Yin Zhiping turned around and took a few glances back and hurried away.

Yang Guo laughed, "That Taoist looks like he's lost his soul, very amusing."

He returned towards the thatch huts and saw Xiao Longnu's legs appearing out of a thicket of flowers not moving at all, it looked as if she was asleep.

Yang Guo called out twice, "Gu Gu!" But there was no reply. He went over to her only to see Xiao Longnu lying on the ground; a blue green cloth was covering her eyes.

Yang Guo was slightly alarmed. He took off the blindfold; her eyes and cheek seemed to be different, seemingly showing a limitless delicate shyness.

Yang Guo asked, "Gu Gu, who tied this blindfold?"

Xiao Longnu didn't reply, her eyes hinted at his responsibility. Yang Guo noticed that her body was paralyzed, it appeared that her pressure points had been sealed, he stretched out his hand to pull her up, indeed, she couldn't move. Yang Guo thought for a while and assumed, "It must be Godfather who used his contrary pressure point sealing skill, otherwise no matter how high one's pressure point sealing skill is, Gu Gu would be able to unseal it herself." He then used the technique that Ouyang Feng had just taught him and unsealed her pressure points. Before, when Xiao Longnu's pressure points were sealed, she wasn't able to move, but he didn't predict that when he unsealed them, she would still lay softly in his arms, as if all her muscles and bones had melted away. Yang Guo stretched out his arm and supported her shoulders and softly said, "Gu Gu, my Godfather does things without any thought, don't take much notice of him."

Xiao Longnu placed her head on his chest and softly said, "You do things without thinking, you should be ashamed talking about other people like that!"

Yang Guo saw that she was completely different than she normally was, he was confused and said, "Gu Gu, I...I"

Xiao Longnu raised her head and irately said, "You still call me Gu Gu?"

Yang Guo became even more confused and said, "If I don't call you Gu Gu, what should I call you? You want me to call you Master?"

Xiao Longnu smiled and said, "The way you treated me, how can I be your master any more?"

Yang Guo asked, "How...how did I treat you?"

Xiao Longnu rolled up her sleeve and revealed an arm that was as white as jade with no flaws; where there was a red 'Shou Gong Sha' before, now it had disappeared, embarrassed she said, "Take a look."

Yang Guo touched his head and stroked his ear and said, "Gu Gu, I don't understand."

Xiao Longnu, irritated, said, "I told you, don't call me Gu Gu anymore." She saw Yang Guo was frightened, and unable to speak his feelings so quietly said, "The disciples of the Ancient Tomb sect have always been virgins. Every generation has been virgins. My master gave me the 'shou gong sha', last night...last night what you did to me, how would my arm still have the 'shou gong sha'?"

Yang Guo said, "What did I do to you last night?"

Xiao Longnu turned red and said, "There's no need to talk about it."

After a while she softly said, "Before, I was afraid to leave the mountain, it's different now, where ever you go, I'm willing to follow you."

Yang Guo was delighted and called out, "Gu Gu, you're great."

Xiao Longnu's face changed and said, "Why are you still calling me Gu Gu? Could it be that you've not treated me genuinely with all your heart?" She saw that Yang Guo did not reply, her heart was anxious, she shivered, "What exactly am I to you?"

Yang Guo earnestly said, "You are my Master, you took care of me, you taught me, I swore that I will respect and revere you for the rest of my life, and listen to all you say."

Xiao Longnu said loudly, "Could it be that you don't regard me as your wife?"

Yang Guo had never ever thought about this; after being asked this he didn't know how to reply, he mumbled, "No, no! You can't be my wife, how could I be worthy to be your husband? You are my Master, you are my Gu Gu."

The chi in Xiao Longnu's body was aggravated; she spat out a pool of blood.

Yang Guo's arms and legs were flailing, and called out, "Gu Gu, Gu Gu!"

Xiao Longnu heard that he was still calling her this way and stared at him with hate, she raised her left palm, wanting to strike down on his head, but the palm did not come. Her eyes turned from fury to blame, and then turned from blame to pity, she sighed and quietly said, "Since it's like this, then there's no need to see me ever again." She waved her sleeve, got up and hurried down the mountain.

Yang Guo called out loudly, "Gu Gu, where are you going? I'll come with you."

Xiao Longnu turned around, beads of tears were swirling in her eyes, she said, "If you see me again, then I'm afraid...I'm afraid I won't be able to control myself, I won't be able to spare your life."

Yang Guo said, "You are angry at me for learning martial arts with my Godfather, is that it?"

Xiao Longnu coldly said, "Why would I blame you for learning martial arts from other people?" She turned around and flew away.

Yang Guo was startled by all this and didn't know what to do, he saw her white image gradually getting further away, and eventually disappeared around the mountain side. He was filled with sorrow; he fell onto the ground and cried. He thought and thought, he didn't know what he did to disrespect his Master. What made her behave so strangely, she was gentle and tender one minute, the next she was furious? Why did she say she wanted to be his 'wife', why wasn't he allowed to call her Gu Gu anymore, he thought for half a day. "This must have something to do with my Godfather; he must have disrespected master somehow." So he ran to Ouyang Feng, but Ouyang Feng's eyes still blankly stared into space, he didn't move an inch.

Yang Guo said, "Father, what did you do to disrespect my Master?"

Ouyang Feng said, "Nine Yin Manual", "Nine Yin Manual".

Yang Guo said, "Why did you seal her pressure points and make her so angry?"

Ouyang Feng said, "Is it surge through 'Sky Pillar' contrarily, or is it surge through 'Sealing Door'?"

Yang Guo desperately said, "Father, why did my Master run away? Tell me, what did you do to her?"

Ouyang Feng said, "Who is your Master? Who am I? Who is Ouyang Feng?"

Yang Guo saw that his illness was acting up again, he was frightened and sad, he softly said, "Father, you are tired, we'll go and rest in the huts."

Ouyang Feng flipped upside down, his head on the ground and called out, "Who am I? Who am I? Where is Ouyang Feng?" He waved his palms wildly, his body flipping around, he used his hands to walk, and like the wind, he flew down the mountain.

Yang Guo called out, "Father!" He wanted to grab him but was kicked on the chin by his flailing leg. It was a heavy kick; Yang Guo couldn't keep upright and fell backwards. By the time he got back up, Ouyang Feng was over a hundred feet away. Yang Guo chased after him for a few steps, then stopped; he stood there for half an hour, and by that time there wasn't a trace of Ouyang Feng. He looked around, and saw the valley was empty, he could only hear the quiet sound of birds.

He became frightened and called out, "Gu Gu, Gu Gu! Father...Father!" After a while, the valley echoed back, "Gu Gu, Gu Gu! Father...Father!"

Within the past few years he had never been away from Xiao Longnu one step, like a mother and son, a sister and brother; now she suddenly went away without an explanation. How could anyone tell him not to be sad? In his grief he thought about crashing his head into a rock and killing himself. But there was optimism in his heart; if his Master could suddenly leave, she could suddenly come back. His Godfather may have disrespected her, but when she considers that I haven't done anything, she will come back and search for me.

How could he sleep well that night, as soon as he heard the wind blow, or the cry of birds, he would think that Xiao Longnu had returned. He would laboriously get up and call out, "Gu Gu!" and go out to meet her; but each time he was disappointed. Eventually he decided against sleeping, he hurried to the summit of the mountain, and strained his eyes and looked around, he looked until the sky got bright. The peak was covered in mist, and on this large earth, there was only Yang Guo left.

Yang Guo suddenly thought, "Master isn't coming back, I'll find her myself. As long as I can see her, I don't care if she shouts at me or beats me, I won't ever leave her. If she wants to beat me to death, then I'll let her." He made up his mind and he felt rejuvenated. He went back to the huts and put his and Xiao Longnu's belongings into a bag, strapped it across his back, and headed away from the mountain.

As soon as he arrived at a place where there were people, he would ask if they have seen a beautiful girl dressed in white. In half a day, he asked tens of villagers, they all shook their head and said no. Yang Guo was anxious and asked again, but he lacked any manners in the way he asked. The villagers saw this young man boldly asking about the whereabouts of a beautiful girl, they couldn't help but get angry; someone asked him who the girl was. Yang Guo said, "That doesn't concern you. I ask you have you seen a girl like that pass here." The person wanted to question him instead.

An old man to one side tugged at his sleeve, pointed and said he saw a beautiful angel heading east, "I thought that the Goddess of Mercy had appeared but it was your woman." Yang Guo did not wait for him to finish and quickly thanked him and headed in the direction he pointed, he heard a laugh behind him as he hurried, but he didn't take any notice. He didn't know that the old man had seen that he was young and impolite so deliberately lied to him.

After a while, a fork appeared in the road, he didn't know which one to pick. He thought, "Gu Gu doesn't like crowds, it's more likely she will pick a quiet and secluded road." He picked the small twisty path on the left. How would he know that the path became wider as he walked, after a few turns, the path joined up with a large road. He hadn't had anything to drink or eat for one whole day, his stomach growled, and then he saw a few buildings in front of him. It was a town, he hurried to the inn and called, "Bring me some rice and vegetable dishes."

The inn owner bought him some everyday vegetable dishes and rice, he took a few gulps before he started to feel sad, he was beginning to choke up, he couldn't eat anymore. He thought, "Although it is dark, I still need to find Gu Gu. If I miss this chance to tonight, I'm afraid that I will never be able to see her again." He pushed away the dishes and called out, "Inn owner, I have something to ask you."

The inn owner smiled and walked over, "What orders has Master got for me? Aren't the dishes to your taste? I'll go and make something else, what does master like to eat?"

Yang Guo waved his hand and said, "It's nothing to do with the food. I ask you, have you seen a beautiful girl dressed in white pass by here?"

The inn owner pondered and said, "In a white dress, hmm, why is the girl dressed like that? Has someone from her family died?"

Yang Guo was getting impatient and asked, "Have you seen her?"

The inn owner said, "A girl yes, and she was wearing white."

Yang Guo was pleased and said, "Which way did she go?"

The inn owner said, "She's been gone for half a day! Master, it's best not to provoke that girl," he suddenly lowered his voice and said; "I offer you advice! Don't go and try to find her."

Yang Guo was alarmed and pleased, he's finally found the whereabouts of his Gu Gu, he quickly asked, "Where is she?" His voice quivered as he said this.

The inn owner said, "I'll ask you first, do you know that girl knows martial arts?"

Yang Guo thought, "How wouldn't I know?" He quickly said, "I know she knows kung fu."

The inn owner said, "Why are you still looking for her? It's dangerous."

Yang Guo said, "What exactly happened?"

The inn owner said, "First tell me, who exactly is that beautiful girl dressed in white to you?"

Yang Guo had no other ideas, it seemed like if he didn't answer his question the inn owner would not tell him the whereabouts of Xiao Longnu so he said, "She is...she is my older sister, I need to find her."

When the man heard him he immediately became even more respectful but shook his head and said, "It doesn't look like it, it doesn't look like it."

Yang Guo was impatient and grabbed him by the throat, then shouted, "Are you going to tell me or not!"

The inn owner's tongue hung out and said, "Yes, yes, it looks like it!"

Yang Guo shouted, "What doesn't look like and what does?"

The inn owner said, "Master, first let go, my throat is being choked by you, 'hei' 'hei', I can't talk. I can of course force myself to talk but..."

Yang Guo thought about this person and decided that using force on him would be in vain so he let go.

The inn owner coughed a few times and said, "Master, I said it doesn't look like it because that girl, 'hei' 'hei', your bigger sister looks younger than you, it looks more like your younger sister, not older. When I said it looks like it, I was talking about your fiery temper was the same as hers, both of you like using your fists."

When Yang Guo heard this he became slightly more relaxed and a smile appeared, and said, "My...my sister fought someone?"

The inn owner said, "Is that bad news? Not only did she fight, she hurt some people as well, look, look." He pointed to some weapon marks on a table. He said, "It was extremely dangerous, your sister's skills are great, one chop and she cut off two Taoists' ears."

Yang Guo laughed and asked, "What Taoists?" thinking that it must have been the Quanzhen Taoists who were causing trouble for his Gu Gu.

The inn owner said, "They are..." as he said this, his face suddenly changed, his head shrunk back and he turned around and walked away.

Yang Guo knew something was wrong and didn't chase after him; he picked up his bowl of rice and chopsticks, and scooped rice into his mouth. He glanced over, and saw two Taoists entering the inn. They were about twenty-six or seven years of age, there was a bandage across their cheeks and they sat at the table next to Yang Guo. A thick browed Taoist

gave an order to quickly bring out some dishes and wine. The inn owner smiled and came over; he winked at Yang Guo and twisted his lips in their direction. Yang Guo pretended he didn't see and buried his head and started eating. When he heard news of Xiao Longnu his appetite was better, after one bowl there came another. His clothes were Xiao Longnu's work, they were rough and simple; traveling for one day and night covered his body with mud and dirt; he looked like a young villager. The two Taoists didn't look at him; they talked to each other quietly.

Yang Guo deliberately ate noisily, and twisted his body over to listen to what they were saying.

He heard the thick browed Taoist say, "Apprentice brother Pi, do you think Han and Chen will come tonight?"

The other Taoist had a large jaw, he replied deeply, "Those two are good and honest men of the Beggar Clan, and have a friendship with our Martial Uncle Shen. At Martial Uncle Shen's request, they will definitely be here."

Yang Guo took a closer look at them, and surveyed their faces; he didn't know them and thought, "The Quanzhen have over a thousand Taoists, I can't recognize them but they could recognize that I'm the little punk that was expelled from the sect, I better not face them. Huh, they couldn't beat my Gu Gu, now they are meeting some Beggar Clan members to get help."

The thick browed Taoist said, "You really can't be sure, it's a long journey..." The Taoist named Pi said, "Hmm, apprentice brother Ji, there's no use in worrying about it now, forget the fact that she is a girl, she has..."

The Taoist name Ji quickly said, "Drink the wine, don't talk about it." They talked to the inn owner, and ordered an upper class room; they were going to rest in the inn that night."

Yang Guo heard their words, and thought that if he followed them quietly, he would be able to see his master. As he thought about this, there was no limit to his happiness. After the two went to their room, he ordered the inn owner to prepare a small room for him next to theirs. The inn owner took a lamp and quietly whispered into Yang Guo's ear, "Master, you need to be careful, they want to take revenge on your sister for cutting their ears off."

Yang Guo quietly said, "My sister's temper is extremely good, why would she cut off their ear?"

The inn owner revealed a smile and quietly said, "Of course your sister treats you well, but not to others. Your sister was having a meal here... 'Hei' 'hei', is she really your sister? I don't really believe it, even if it was your sister, all the Taoists did was sit by her and stare at her leg a few times. Your sister got into a rage; she took her sword and started to attack the Taoists..." he wanted to carry on. Yang Guo saw that the light next door had been extinguished, he waved his hand to tell him to keep quiet, he was angry and thought, "The Taoists must have seen that my Gu Gu was beautiful and stared at her, making her angry. Huh, why would there be any good people in the Quanzhen sect?" He then thought, "Gu Gu once had a fight with Chongyang Palace, the two Taoists would recognize her, why were they staring at her face?"

He waited for the inn owner to leave, and then extinguished his light and got into bed. He decided he wouldn't sleep that night, he went over the two skills that Ouyang Feng had taught him, but the two skill's formulae were very complex, Ouyang Feng had recited it confusingly, he could only remember at most twenty or thirty percent, he didn't dare to give it much thought just in case he became lost in thought and become unaware of what happened next door.

He quietly kept guard up until the middle of the night, then suddenly he heard two noises; someone was jumping over the wall from outside. The window next door opened.

The Taoist named Ji asked, "Is it Han and Chen?"

Someone replied, "It's us."

The Taoist named Ji said, "Please enter!" He lightly opened the door and lit the oil lamp. Yang Guo concentrated and listened in.

He heard the Taoist named Ji say, "We Ji Qingxu and Pi Qingxuan greet the heroes Han and Chen."

Yang Guo thought, "The Quanzhen follow the motto 'Aim for Tranquility', these two Taoists belong to the fourth generation disciples, I don't know whether they follow the teachings of Hao Datong or Liu Chuxuan."

He heard a person with a high voice say, "We received the message from your Martial Uncle Shen, we didn't even stop our horses once and rushed straight here. Is that little bitch so powerful?"

Ji Qingxu said, "It's embarrassing, the two of us fought for a while but we weren't her match."

That person said, "What kind of martial arts does she have."

Ji Qingxu said, "Martial Uncle Shen suspects that she is a disciple of the Ancient Tomb sect, though she is young she has very good martial arts."

When Yang Guo heard the three words 'Ancient Tomb sect' he couldn't refrain from making two quiet grunts.

He heard Ji Qingxu add, "When Martial Uncle Shen mentioned the Ancient Tomb sect, the little bitch cursed and

insulted the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' Li Mochou, but we don't know what it was about."

That person said, "So it looks like she doesn't have any powerful connections. You are going to meet tomorrow? How many people has the opposition got?"

Ji Qingxu said, "Martial Uncle Shen and that girl agreed to meet tomorrow at high noon, at 'Chailang' (wolf) valley forty li southwest from here, and having a duel to decide the matter. We don't know how many people the opposition has. With the help of the skilled Beggar Clan fighters Han and Chen, we won't be afraid that the opposition has too many people."

The other older voice said, "Fine, we'll be at that place at high noon tomorrow, brother Han, let's go."

Ji Qingxu showed them to the door and quietly said, "We are not far from Chongyang Palace, this duel must not be known to the Grand Masters Ma, Qiu, Wang, Liu, otherwise we'll be punished severely."

The one named Han laughed and said, "Your Martial Uncle Shen had already said this in his letter, and otherwise, why would you need the help of us two when Chongyang Palace has so many skilled fighters?"

The one named Chen said, "Relax, we won't leak anything. It goes without saying that Elder Ma, Liu, Qiu, Wang, Hao, Sun mustn't know about this; if your Martial Uncles find out about this I'm afraid that it'll be the same result for you." The two Taoists agreed at the same time.

Yang Guo thought, "They are ganging up together to bully my Gu Gu, but are afraid that others will find out, huh, sneaking around like this, they know they are scoundrels."

He heard the four speak a few more words, and then Ji Qingxu and Pi Qingxuan escorted them to the wall where Han and Chen departed.

End of Chapter 7.

Chapter 8 - Girl in White

Translated by Noodles



Yang Guo saw Lu Wushuang was now staring danger in the face; he had no time to delay; he poked the bull in the buttocks. The bull started to dash at the six. The six of them were absorbed in battle when they suddenly saw a mad bull rushing forward; they were all alarmed and leaped out of the way.

Yang Guo quietly opened the window and slipped inside the room of the two Taoists. He saw two bags on the bed, he lifted one up and felt its weight, there were about twenty taels of silver and thought, "Just what I need for traveling expenses." He took it and placed it into his pocket. The other bag was around four feet long; it held two long swords. He took each one out separately and easily snapped the two swords; then placed each back into their sheath. He then wrapped the swords up. He was about to leave the room when another thought crossed his mind, he took off his trousers and urinated all over the Taoists' quilts and blankets.

He heard the sounds of someone climbing up a wall, and knew that the Taoists' lightness kung fu was very ordinary; they weren't able to clear the wall in a single leap. They had to first climb up on top of the wall and then leap down. He quickly darted back into his room, quietly closing the window. The Taoists did not notice anything. Yang Guo placed his ear against the wall to hear what was happening. He heard the Taoists quietly talking; they seemed to think that victory in tomorrow's duel was in their grasp. They were undressing when suddenly Pi Qingxuan called out, "Hey, why are the blankets damp and wet? Ah, it stinks, apprentice brother Ji, why are you so lazy; wetting yourself on the blankets?"

Ji Qingxu spat out, "What wetting yourself?" He picked up the blanket and called out, "When did a stinking cat urinate

here?”

Pi Qingxuan said, “How can a cat urinate so much?”

Ji Qingxu said, “Hmm, that’s strange; where’s our money?” Suddenly the room was turned upside down as the two searched for their money. Yang Guo sniggered.

He heard Pi Qingxuan call out loudly, “Inn owner, inn owner, this is an evil inn, isn’t it? Stealing money from guests in the middle of the night?”

They called out a few times; the inn owner woke up from his sleep and came to ask what they wanted. Pi Qingxuan grabbed his chest and said that he was running an evil inn. The inn owner made a clamor, and alerted the inn’s waiters, kitchen staff and the attendants. The guests of the inn also all came out to see what it was all about. Yang Guo hid himself amongst the crowd, and saw the inn owner having his way in the argument, his mouth and tongue couldn’t stop moving, refuting so much that the two Taoists couldn’t get a word in edgeways. That inn owner loved to argue; normally he would stir up trouble with others even when nothing had happened. Now someone had started to provoke him first, in spite of the fact was that justice was completely on his side. He spoke until his mouth started to foam up, and his spirits were becoming more and more intense. The two Taoists were angry and embarrassed; they wanted to use force but they remembered the rules of their sect. They were now at the foot of Mount Zhongnan, how would they dare start trouble? They could only swallow their anger, close their door, and sleep for the night. The inn owner continued to chatter and grumble outside non-stop.

The next morning Yang Guo got up and ate a bowl of noodles. The chatty inn owner came over to greet him and he kept on mumbling curses and insults under his breath. Yang Guo smiled and asked, “How are those two villainous Taoists?”

The inn owner brashly said, "Real bastards. Those Taoists wanted to eat and live here free and so in respect for the Chongyang Palace I was going to allow it. But they dare to say that I am running an evil inn. Huh, I'm definitely going to tell the Chongyang Palace. The Taoists of Quanzhen are thousands and thousands in number, which one of them doesn't adhere to the strict rules and regulations? I can clearly remember the two villainous scoundrel Taoists' faces; I'm definitely going to point them out..." Yang Guo was amused and stirred in a few words of his own; he gave him the money for the room and food, and then made sure he knew the way to 'Wolf Valley' and he left.

In the wink of an eye he had already traveled over thirty li and wasn't far from the 'Wolf Valley'. He looked up at the sky and saw that it was still early. He thought, "I'll first hide off to the side and watch how Gu Gu copes with the enemy. It's best if Gu Gu does not recognize me at first."

Yang Guo thought about the day when he fooled Hong Lingbo, and felt pleased with himself, and decided to do the same once more. He went to a nearby farmer's house, and looked around in the back garden, he saw a large bad tempered bull, its horns knocking into the bull pen and making loud noises. Yang Guo's brain lit up and thought, "I'll pretend to be a farmer, and Gu Gu will definitely not be able to recognize me."

He quietly sneaked into the house. In the house he saw two babies playing on the floor so he didn't dare make any sort of noise. He found a set of farmer's clothes and changed into them and then put on a pair of grass shoes. He got some dirt and rubbed it onto his face. On the wall was a bamboo rain hat, which he took and wore. He picked up a grass rope and tied it around his waist, and then inserted a short flute in it. He went out and opened the gate to the bull pen. When the

bull saw him coming, it began to get angry and when it saw the gate was open, it charged forward aiming to ram into his body. Yang Guo's left palm pushed down on the bull's head, and he flipped onto its back. The bull was tall and bulky; each leg weighed nearly one hundred kilos, its tail long and horns sharp. It was extremely large. In the blink of an eye it had already charged onto the main road. It was angry, violent and hot-tempered at this moment in time; it used all its strength to jump upwards, wanting to buck Yang Guo off its back. Yang Guo rode on its back steadily, and was extremely pleased with himself. He laughed and said, "If you don't obey you are going to suffer." He raised his palm, and chopped down on the bull's head. He only used twenty percent of his strength, and the bull could not endure it and bellowed. It wanted to jump again but Yang Guo sent down another chop. He chopped it on the head about ten or so times and the bull eventually did not dare to retaliate. Yang Guo then poked the bull's neck with his finger on the left side and it turned right; when he poked it on the right side of the neck, it turned left, when he poked it on the back it moved forward, and when poked at the front it moved back. He was able to control its movements with his finger. Yang Guo then used his strength to poke its behind and the bull headed forward fiercely. It dashed ahead as if it were a horse. In a short while they passed a forest, and came to a valley surrounded by mountains. It was how the inn owner described it. He leapt down from the bull's back, and allowed it to graze on the grass on the mountain slopes. His hand held the rope as he lay down on the ground.

He looked at the sun and saw it gradually approaching the middle of the sky. He was becoming more and more nervous; he was afraid that Xiao Longnu would ignore the meeting and wouldn't show up. It was quiet and peaceful all around, with only the bull making a few snorting noises. Suddenly, at the entrance to the valley were the sounds of palms clashing,

followed by more sounds of palms clashing from the south side. Yang Guo was lying on the slope, one muddy leg crossed over his knee, his bamboo hat was covering his face, only his right eye was revealed.

After a while, three Taoists appeared at the entrance to the valley. Two of them were the Taoists from last night at the inn, Ji Qingxu and Pi Qingxuan, the other was about forty years old, he was quite short. He was probably Martial Uncle Shen. Yang Guo studied his face and remembered that he saw him at Chongyang Palace before. Two men followed. One was a rugged looking man; the other was an old man with a head full of white hair. They were the Beggar Clan members Chen and Han. The five walked closer and saluted each other. Then they formed a line, all looked around.

At that time, a quiet trotting sound was heard from outside the mouth of the valley. The five men all looked at each other and stared at the entrance to the valley. They heard the sound getting closer and closer; then there was a black and white object at the entrance of the valley. It was a girl in white riding on top of a black donkey coming forward.

When Yang Guo saw this his heart quivered, "It's not Gu Gu! Could it be another one of their team?" He saw the girl rein in the donkey a few feet away from the five. She glanced at them coldly; her face was filled with contempt and it looked like she didn't want to speak to them.

Ji Qingxu called out, "Little Bitch, well, well, well, you do have guts; you might as well call your help out."

The girl chuckled, a 'shua' sound was heard as she pulled out a small thin saber from her waist; it looked like the curved moon, the silver glittering in one's eye.

Ji Qingxu said, "There are five of us, we can't wait patiently for your help to arrive."

The girl waved her saber and said, "This is my help." The saber producing a 'weng' noise as it was waved in the air." When she said this, the six of them were shocked. The five were shocked at the fact that a girl, by herself, would have the guts to fight five skilled fighters without any help. Yang Guo was extremely disappointed and hurt, he was sure that he would see Xiao Longnu. How could he know that the so-called 'beautiful girl in white' was another person? The air in his chest surged up; he wasn't able to control it anymore and called out. When he called out, the other six were alarmed; but all they saw was a farmer letting his bull graze on the slope and they didn't take any notice of him. They thought that it was just a young country bumpkin who had suffered some problem and was crying out.

Ji Qingxu pointed at the one named Han and said, "This is the Beggar Clan's hero Han." He pointed to the one named Chen and said, "This is the Beggar Clan's hero Chen." He then pointed to 'Martial Uncle Shen' and said, "Our Martial Uncle Shen Zhifan, you've seen him before."

The girl ignored him, her eyes cold, she glanced at them a few times, treating them as nothing.

Shen Zhifan said, "You came on your own; so we can't fight with you. We'll give you a deadline of ten days. In ten days you need to bring four helpers to meet us."

The girl answered, "I've said I've already got my help; against you bunch of nobodies why do I need to get more people?"

Shen Zhifan angrily said, "Little girl, you really are bold." His words were meant to be insults and he managed to force himself to ask, "Are you from the Ancient Tomb sect?"

The girl said, "So what if I am? So what if I'm not? You stupid old Taoist, do you have the guts to fight with me or don't

you?”

Shen Zhifan saw that she was alone but was sure that she had strong back-up and had them nearby. He was also afraid that he would invite trouble from the Ancient Tomb's Li Mochou so he said, “Miss, I have a question; why did you hurt members of my sect for no reason? If it was our fault, then I will publicly apologize to your master, but if Miss can't give a good reason then forgive us for being impolite.”

The girl chuckled and said, “Of course it was those two bullish Taoists' fault and I just taught them a lesson. If there weren't so many scoundrels in the world, why would I cut off their ears?”

Shen Zhifan saw that she was extremely brash and couldn't help being startled. The beggar named Chen was old but he still had a temper; he took a step forward and shouted, “Little girl, you are talking to Seniors here, how come you haven't got off your donkey?” As he said this he shot forward towards the black donkey and stretched out a hand to grab her right arm. His hand came out extremely quick. The girl wasn't able to dodge it and she was grabbed immediately. Her right hand was also the hand that was holding her blade, so she wasn't able to use it to repel the attack. Unexpectedly, the cold light of the saber moved, the girl's arm twisted and the curved blade sliced down. Beggar Chen was startled and quickly let go. At least he was alert, and quickly changed his stance but the blade had cut two fingers. He quickly leapt back and drew out a saber and called out, “Bitch, you must be bored with your life.” The beggar named Han drew out a lead hammer, and Shen Zhifan drew out his sword. Ji Qingxu and Pi Qingxuan took hold of their swords' handles and pulled them out. But they felt that something was wrong with the sword's weight. Both of them called out ‘Ai!’ in shock, the swords in their hands were broken.

When the girl saw the two Taoists' expressions she couldn't stop herself from laughing. Yang Guo was lamenting at this time, when he heard the girl laugh he looked at the two Taoists' embarrassed expression. He couldn't stop himself from turning his tears into laughter. He saw the girl bend her waist and hack down with her saber at Pi Qingxuan's head. Pi Qingxuan quickly pulled back his head but he didn't know the move wasn't finished, a slight turn of the wrist and the saber turned in the air and eventually cut Pi Qingxuan's right cheek; blood started to flow from it. The other four were alarmed and angry, they quickly surrounded her. The Taoists Pi and Ji retreated to the rear, their hands holding onto the broken swords. They didn't want to throw them away but they weren't much use. They didn't know what to do.

The girl called out clearly, her left hand pulled on the reins and the donkey dashed forward. Beggar Chen and Han were the closest, the blade and the hammer both attacked. Shen Zhifan followed and used Quanzhen's sword techniques, every stance aiming for the important points of the enemy. Yang Guo saw that although his sword skills were vicious, compared with Zhao Zhijing and Yin Zhiping, their skills were far apart. Out of the Taoists with the name Zhi, he was the lesser skilled. Yang Guo was now calm, he studied the girl's face carefully; he saw that she had a pretty oval face and she was younger than him by a year or so. It's no wonder the inn owner didn't believe that the 'beautiful girl in white' was his older sister. Though she wore white, her skin was slightly dark; it was very different from the brilliant snow white of Xiao Longnu. He saw that her saber stances were light and swift and seemed to be derived from the Ancient Tomb sword stances; there were more stabs and thrusts and rather less chops and hacks.

Yang Guo watched for a few stances and thought, "Indeed she is using our sect's kung fu, could it be that she is a student of Li Mochou?" Yang Guo thought that both sides

weren't good people and he didn't care less who won or lost; but then another thought entered his mind. "How could you be the 'beautiful girl in white'? You're not even worthy to be my Gu Gu's maid." He folded his arms behind his head and lay down facing the sky, watching the battle.

For the first ten moves or so, the girl was able to hold her own; she was on the donkey's back, attacking from above with the saber. The five of them had no choice but to jump back and dodge. Another ten moves passed, Ji Qingxu saw that the broken sword in his hand was useless, then thought suddenly entered him and he called out, "Apprentice brother Pi, follow me." He quickly headed to the nearby woods and picked a fine small tree; he chopped its roots and branches with his broken swords and made a large club. Pi Qingxuan did the same. The two attacked from the left and right, thrusting toward the donkey.

The girl quietly said, "Shameless!" She waved her saber at them to fend them off and became distracted. Beggar Han's hammer and Shen Zhifan's sword arrived. The girl quickly used a risky technique; she lowered her head and slanted her body, the hammer's wind swept over her face. A clashing sound was heard as the saber met with the sword and at that moment the black donkey cried out in pain and reared. Ji Qingxu had struck it with the club. Beggar Chen did a roll and used his saber techniques. The flat side of his saber struck heavily down on the donkey's leg; the donkey immediately rolled over. The young girl was now unable to fight them from the donkey's back. She saw a sword coming straight at her and immediately flew away; she grabbed Pi Qingxuan's stick and snapped it in half. Her legs landed on the ground and she slashed across with her saber, repelling beggar Chen's chop.

Yang Guo was startled, "What? Is she hurt?"

The girl was actually slightly lame in her left leg, from the leap, one could see her restricted movements, and this is why she had refused to come down from her donkey. Yang Guo's heroic nature was moved and he wanted to intervene and help her. But a thought entered his mind, "Gu Gu and I were fine living in the tomb; it was that evil woman Li Mochou who caused us to be in this situation. That girl pretends to be my Gu Gu, wanting people to call her the 'beautiful girl in white', she's shameless!" He turned away and stopped watching.

But he kept on hearing the continuous sounds of clashing weapons and wasn't able to curb his curiosity, he turned his head again. He saw that the situation had now changed, the girl was now dodging east and evading west, and she was defending more than attacking. Suddenly the Han beggar's metal hammer came flying in, the girl moved her head and dodged it, at the same time, Shen Zhifan's sword slashed across. A 'ding' sound was heard, her silver hair loop was cut; half her hair swept down. The girl's brows raised, her mouth opened, a frosty look came upon her face as she turned her hand and slashed across.

Yang Guo saw her angry expression and his heart shook, "When Gu Gu was angry, she looked exactly like this." Because the girl became angry Yang Guo decided to help her. He picked up seven or eight stones and placed them in his pocket. He glanced at her again and saw that she was in a frantic situation.

Shen Zhifan called out, "What exactly is your relationship to the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' Li Mochou? If you don't tell us truthfully, don't blame us for our actions!"

The girl's saber slashed across, hooking across the back of his head. Shen Zhifan couldn't predict that she would do this

and wasn't able to block. Beggar Chen quickly called out, "Careful!"

Ji Qingxu fiercely struck the curved saber with his large stick and managed to save the life of Shen Zhifan. The five saw that her stances were all ruthless, not leaving anything to chance. In a short while, the girl continuously unleashed a series of dangerous stances. Shen Zhifan was sure that she was connected to Li Mochou somehow; if news of this ever got to that evil woman, he would have boundless troubles. He saw that she indeed did not have any back up, now was a good chance to kill her and seal her mouth. Every stance he used was aiming to wound the girl.

Yang Guo saw that the girl was now staring danger in the face; he had no time to delay so he flipped up and got on the bull's back. He hung his legs from its back and dangled down underneath and then poked the bull in the buttocks. The bull started to dash at the six.

The six of them were absorbed in battle when they suddenly saw a mad bull rushing forward; they were all alarmed and leaped out of the way. Yang Guo was dangling below the bull and saw the pressure points on the backs of the five men, the pebbles shot out, they were struck in the 'Soul Entrance' and the 'Spirit Hall' pressure points. He heard calls of 'Ai Ya!' and the five felt their arms become numb; their weapons dropped from their hands. Yang Guo then sent the bull up the slope. He dropped down from the bull's stomach onto the ground and called out, "Oh no, the bull's gone mad!"

Shen Zhifan's pressure points were sealed and his weapon escaped from his hand; but he didn't see the enemy do this and thought that this was the deed of the girl's backup. That person was highly skilled, how did he dare to fight anymore? Luckily his legs were still able to move, he quickly ran away but he still remembered his friends and called out, "Brother

Chen, Brother Han, let's go!" The others didn't think about it and followed. Pi Qingxuan lost his bearings and was actually running towards the girl. Ji Qingxu called out, "Apprentice brother Pi, over here!" Pi Qingxuan was about to turn around when the girl took a step forward and chopped down with her saber. Pi Qingxuan was alarmed, he didn't have a weapon and quickly dodged to the side, but how would he know that the girl's saber wasn't chopping down in a fixed direction, it went east and then west, the light of the blade glimmered as it was about to slash down across his face. Pi Qingxuan raised his arm; a 'ca' sound was made as the saber hacked off four fingers. He had yet to feel the pain as he quickly turned around and ran away.

Beggar Han ran ten or so steps and saw that the girl did not follow and thought, "That Bitch is lame, how can she chase us?" When he considered that she was lame, he glanced at her left leg, then turned around and hurried away. How would he know that look angered the girl, she couldn't contain her fury and shouted out, "Scoundrel, don't you think I can't catch up with you?" She lifted her saber and swung it around a few times; a 'fu' sound was made as she threw it. She saw the saber glimmer in midair, a 'pu' sound was heard as the saber plunged itself in the left shoulder of beggar Han. That person kept on running with the saber in his back. In a short while, the five of them had escaped into the forest.

The girl chuckled but was suspicious, "Could there be someone nearby? Why did they help me?" The beggar named Han had taken the saber that she normally used away; she felt that it was such a pity. She picked up the saber that Beggar Chen had left and quickly went over to the forest to take a look but there wasn't a trace of anyone around and returned to the valley. She saw Yang Guo sobbing miserably on the ground, calling and shouting out that woe is me.

The girl asked, "Hey, little farmer, what woe are you talking about?"

Yang Guo said, "The bull's gone mad, it's skin and body is ripped and bruised, when I get back to Master's house he's definitely going to kill me."

The young girl took a look at the bull, but saw nothing was wrong with it and said, "Fine, your bull did help me out, I'll give you some money." As she said this she took out some money and threw it down to the ground. She thought that Yang Guo was going to thank her, but she didn't predict that Yang Guo would still have the same expression on his face, shaking his head not picking up the money.

The young girl said, "What's wrong with you fool, its money."

Yang Guo said, "One ingot is not enough." The girl took another ingot and threw it down to the ground. Yang Guo wanted to tease her some more and shook his head.

The young girl got angry and raised her eyebrows, and shouted, "I've no more fool!" She turned around and walked away. When Yang Guo saw her angry expression, he couldn't stop the blood in his chest and head rushing. His eyes ached, he remembered the expression that Xiao Longnu had when she scolded him, he made a decision, "If I can't find Gu Gu for the time being, I might as well look at that girl's angry look." He stretched out and grabbed her right leg and called out, "You can't go!"

The girl tried to pull away but he held her so tightly that she wasn't able to escape; she became even angrier and shouted, "Let go! Why are you holding onto me?"

Yang Guo saw that her anger was growing and he became happier. He called out, "I'm not going to return home, save me." He then loudly called out, "Save me, save me!"

The young girl was angry but was amused at the same time, she raised her saber and called out, "If you don't let go I'll chop you to death in one go."

Yang Guo held on even tighter and pretended to cry, he said, "Chop me to death, I'll be dead anyway if I return home."

The girl said, "Where do you want to go?"

Yang Guo said, "I don't know, I'll follow you."

The young girl thought, "There's no reason to have a little idiot following me around." She raised her saber and hacked down. Yang Guo thought that she wasn't really going to do it so he held tightly to her leg. He couldn't have guessed that the girl was ruthless; her chop was really heading for his head. Although she didn't want to kill him she did want to cut down on his head and let him suffer a little so he won't dare to bother her again. Yang Guo saw the saber coming down on him, when there was just a few inches between his head and the blade he rolled away and called out, "Murderer, murderer!"

The girl became angrier and dashed forward wanting to slash down again. Yang Guo was lying on the ground, his legs flying everywhere, he called out, "I'm dead...I'm dead!" His muddy legs and hands were scrambling about everywhere; he made himself look as dreadful as possible. But when the girl came hacking down with her saber, his leg would kick her wrist and in the end she wasn't able to hack down again. Yang Guo saw her angry expression; it was what he wanted to see and he stared at her. The girl saw that he was looking weird and shouted, "Get up!"

Yang Guo said, "Are you going to kill me?"

The girl said, "Fine, I won't kill you." Yang Guo picked himself up and gasped deeply, he secretly restricted his blood flow,

and his face became pale, as if he was scared to death.

The young girl was pleased with herself and gave an 'humph' sound, and said, "Let's see if you'll still dare to trouble me." She raised her saber and pointed to the slope where Pi Qingxuan's fingers were hacked off and said, "I'm fierce and violent; I slashed off his fingers." Yang Guo pretended to be frightened and worried, he kept on shuffling backwards. The girl placed the saber in her belt and turned around to search for her black donkey, but the donkey had long disappeared. She could only travel by foot.

Yang Guo picked up the money and placed it in his pocket. He held the bull's rope and followed her and said, "Gu Gu, take me away."

The girl ignored him and sped up, in a short while she had left him without a trace. Who could have guessed that while she was taking a little break, he was hurrying towards her with the bull calling out, "Take me away...take me away."

The girl eyebrows raised and then utilized her lightness kung fu, in one breath she had gone a few li, and knew that he wouldn't be able to catch up. But in a short while she could hear a quiet call of "Take me away!"

The girl became furious; she turned around and took out her saber, raising it in the air.

Yang Guo called out, "Oh no!" He held his head and ran away. The girl just wanted him to stop following and that was it, she then turned around and walked away. Soon, she heard the snort of a bull; she turned around and saw Yang Guo about forty steps away, holding on to the bull following behind her. She stopped and waited for him. When Yang Guo saw her stop, he stopped moving as well, when she walked, he followed and when she chased after him with the saber he

ran away. This stopping and following continued until it started to get dark; the young girl was still unable to escape from Yang Guo's pursuit. The girl saw that although he looked dumb, his pace was not ordinary and she thought that he must be used to running around in the mountains. She wanted him to catch up to her so she could knock him out or hurt his legs but each time he was able to roll out of the danger and escape.

After a few while, the girl was becoming tired; her left leg was lame and moving was troublesome. She had an idea and called out, "Fine, I'll take you away, you have to listen to what I say."

Yang Guo said delightedly, "You really are going to take me away?"

The girl said, "Yes, why would I lie to you? I'm tired; you ride on the bull and then let me ride with you."

Yang Guo lead the bull forward and caught up, under the cloudy skies, he saw her eye glistened and knew that she was up to something. He climbed onto the back of the bull. The girl's right leg pushed up and she lightly flew up onto the bull's back, sitting in front of Yang Guo. She thought, "My donkey is gone, riding on this bull won't be bad." She kicked the bull hard in the side. The bull felt pain and dashed forward quickly. The girl chuckled and suddenly elbowed backward with strength, hitting Yang Guo in the chest. Yang Guo called out 'Ai Ya!' and rolled off the back of the bull.

The young girl was extremely pleased and thought, "You little scoundrel, you suffered at my hands in the end." She poked the bull in the side and the bull hurried forward even faster. She suddenly heard the calls and shouts from Yang Guo, and the voice was just behind her, she turned her head to look around and saw him holding tightly onto the bull's tail, his legs in midair. He was towed in the air by the bull and his

face was full of dirt and mud. Tears flowed from his eyes; he was extremely frantic but he still held onto the bull's tail tightly. The young girl had no other ideas and so raised her saber aiming to slash down at his arm. She suddenly heard a clamor; the bull had reached a little town.

In the crowd of people the bull had nowhere to go and stopped. Yang Guo wanted to tease the young girl and see her angry face; he lay on the ground and called out, "My chest hurts, you're beating me to death!" The town's people all gathered around and asked why.

The girl was going to take this chance of being surrounded by people and slip into the crowd and escape; but she didn't foresee that Yang Guo would pick himself up and hold onto her right leg. He called out, "Don't go... don't go!" Yang Guo called out, "She's my wife; she doesn't want me and beats me."

A person said, "A wife beating her husband, what is the world coming to?" The girl's eyebrows raised and she kicked out with her left leg. Yang Guo clambered up to the side of a burly man and gave him a push; the kick landed on his waist. The burly man shouted, "Little Bitch, kicking people?" He raised his massive fist. The young girl held the man's elbow and used his strength to fling him away. The hundred kilo body flew into the crowd, causing the people in the crowd to scream and shout, making quite a scene. The girl used all her strength to pull free but how could she when Yang Guo was holding on with all his life? She saw that another five or six people were coming up towards her, adding to her problems. She could only lower her head and say, "I'll take you away, quickly let go."

Yang Guo said, "Are you still going to beat me?"

The young girl said, "Fine, I won't!" Yang Guo loosened his hand and stood up. The two of them rushed out of the crowd

and headed out of the town. They heard shouting from behind. Yang Guo had managed to hold on to the bull.

Yang Guo laughed, and said, "People say that the wife cannot beat the husband."

The young girl angrily said, "Stupid Sha Dan [Dumb Egg]! If you keep on talking this rubbish, saying I'm your wife and what not, just watch me cut your head off." She raised her saber as she said this.

Yang Guo held his head and jumped to the side and pleaded, "Miss, I won't say it anymore."

The girl said, "Look at you, even an ugly old hag wouldn't marry you." Yang Guo laughed foolishly and didn't reply.

Now, the sky was dark, the two stood in the unkempt land; they turned around, and saw smoke from cooking rising up from the town and both felt hungry.

The young girl said, "Sha Dan, go to the market and buy ten buns."

Yang Guo shook his head and said, "I won't go." The young girl's face turned angry and she said, "Why not?" Yang Guo said, "I won't go! You are tricking me to go buy some buns so you could sneak off." The young girl said, "I said I won't slip away so I won't." Yang Guo shook his head. The girl curled up her fist wanting to hit him but he quickly jumped to the side. The two of them ran around the bull like they were playing hide and seek. The girl was lame and it wasn't easy for her to move. She saw the boy tripping up in front of her crying and shouting out, yet, although she possessed lightness kung fu, she was still unable to catch up with him.

The girl was furious, she thought about her martial arts, yet for some reason, she had allowed an ugly and smelly country bumpkin Sha Dan to stay on her tail. She had no way to

escape, it might be said that she was incompetent. Yang Guo had made himself so much like the character he was supposed to be that when the girl failed three or four times to kill the Sha Dan, she was not suspicious. She followed the main road south and she saw that Yang Guo was holding onto the bull and catching up. She thought that she must find a way to kill him unexpectedly. In the short time it takes to cook rice, the sky had become even darker. She saw an old and run down stone house; it looked abandoned and thought, "Tonight I'll sleep here and when that idiot is sleeping in the middle of the night, I'll kill him with one slash." She walked towards the house and entered, dust entered her nose, the chairs and tables were broken and it appeared that this house was deserted long ago. She cut some grass and wiped a long table clean; she lay on the table, closed her eyes and rested. She saw that Yang Guo hadn't followed her, and called out, "Sha Dan! Sha Dan!" She didn't hear a reply and thought, "Could it be that the fool knows that I was going to kill him and left!" She wasn't concerned with it, and after a while she fell asleep. Suddenly the smell of cooking meat entered her nose. She got up and went outside. She saw Yang Guo sitting in the moonlight holding a piece of meat and opening his mouth to bite into it. Before him was a fire, on top of the fire was an array of branches, meat was roasting on it, the smell of it floating towards her.

Yang Guo saw her come out and laughed, and said, "You want some?" He picked up a roasted piece of the meat and threw it towards her. She caught it with her hand and looked at it, it was a shank of meat, and she was hungry and started to eat it. Although it had no salt, it was still tasty. She sat by the fire and politely ate the meat. She first tore the meat off the shank, and then placed it into her mouth slowly, but she saw Yang Guo munching noisily, annoying her. She was hungry so

she turned around and looked away from him. When she finished her meat, Yang Guo gave her another piece.

The young girl said, "Sha Dan, what's your name?"

Yang Guo said, "Are you an angel? How do you know I'm called Sha Dan?"

The young girl laughed and said, "Ha, so your name is Sha Dan. Where are your parents?"

Yang Guo said, "They've been dead a long time. What's your name?"

The young girl said, "I don't know. Why are you asking?"

Yang Guo thought, "Since you won't say then I'll anger you." He said brashly, "I know, you are called Sha Dan too, that's why you won't say."

The young girl got angry. She got up and punched him in the head and scolded, "Who said I'm called Sha Dan? You are the Sha Dan."

Yang Guo cried out and covered his head and said, "When someone asks me what I'm called, I say I don't know so other people call me Sha Dan; since you don't know, that means you are a Sha Dan as well."

The young girl said, "Who says I don't know? I just don't want to tell you. Do you know that my surname is Lu?"

This young girl was the little girl who was picking lotuses in Jiaxing's South Lake, Lu Wushuang. When she was plucking flowers with her cousin Cheng Ying and the Wu brothers, she broke her leg. While Madam Wu was helping to set her leg bones back together, Hong Lingbo arrived to take their lives, so her leg bones weren't set properly. When it healed, her left leg was shorter by an inch or so. Because of this she walks

like a lame person. Although her skin was not white, she was still beautiful. When she was grown up she was even more so, but because her leg was lame, she was hateful.

When Li Mochou killed her parents and took her away, she was going to kill her but when she saw the handkerchief on her neck she remembered Lu Zhanyuan, and so she did not kill her. Lu Wushuang was clever; she knew that her life was hanging on a thread now that she was in Li Mochou's grasp. That witch goes and comes like the wind; she would not be able to run away, so she pretended to be obedient and tried to please her. Eventually the urge to kill the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity', who kills without blinking, calmed down. Sometimes Li Mochou remembered the hurtful events of the past and would summon Lu Wushuang and shout at her for a while. Lu Wushuang would put on a pitiful face and limp along. When Li Mochou saw her sorry look and after shouting at her and getting rid of her anger that would be it. Lu Wushuang pleaded to stay with her, and because she was just a little girl, Li Mochou did eventually allow her to stay. She buried her thoughts of revenge for her parents in her heart. If Li Mochou asked her about it, she pretended that she had forgotten all about them. When Li Mochou and Hong Lingbo were practicing kung fu, she would stand to the side and pass over swords and towels, tea and fruits, concentrating on the practice. She already had a decent foundation, when she watched them practice she noted everything, and when Li Mochou and Hong Lingbo went out, she would secretly practice. She would normally try to get in Hong Lingbo's favour. Later Hong Lingbo took advantage of the mood that Li Mochou was in and pleaded on behalf of Lu Wushuang. Eventually she became her disciple. A few years passed, Lu Wushuang's kung fu improved every day, but Li Mochou was still suspicious of her so did not teach her the most advanced skills. Even the intermediate skills were not passed on. Hong Lingbo took pity on her and would give her some pointers in

secret. Although it couldn't be said that Lu Wushuang's skills were high, her skills were not low either. That day when Li Mochou and Hong Lingbo went to the tomb to search for the "Jade Heart Manual", Lu Wushuang noticed that they did not return for a long time, so she decided to escape and go to Jiaxing in search of news of her parents. Although she saw with her own eyes Li Mochou seriously wounding her parents, she had not seen them die; there was still a glimmer of hope. She held onto this glimmer of hope and went to find out the truth. Before she left, she thought she might as well go all the way, and took Li Mochou's book, the 'Five Poison Codex'; it was a copy of a list of poisons and their antidotes.

Her left leg was lame, and she hated those who looked at it. One day in an inn, two Taoists looked at her leg and she immediately shouted at them. The two Taoists did not have good tempers, so after a few words they used force and they started to fight. With her curved saber, she cut off their ears and agreed to meet them at Wolf Valley the next day.

That day when Li Mochou took her away and headed north, she and Yang Guo met each other at the entrance to the cave. They were both young, their faces had now changed; they weren't able to remember their encounter of years ago.

Lu Wushuang was full after she finished the second piece of roasted meat. Yang Guo used the light of the fire to look at her face, "Where on earth is my Gu Gu? If the girl in front of me was Gu Gu, and I was roasting meat for her, wouldn't that be wonderful?" He was deep in thought, and stared at her as if he was mad.

Lu Wushuang thought, "I'll endure your disrespectful stare for now; I'll kill you later in the middle of the night." She then returned to the stone house and slept.

In the middle of the night, she quietly got up; she went outside and saw Yang Guo by the fire not moving. The fire

had gone out long ago. She went over to him and slashed him with her blade across his back. Her wrist suddenly shook, it started to ache; she couldn't hold onto the saber and let it go. She felt that the place she slashed across was like metal or stone. She became extremely frightened and leapt away, and thought, "Could it be that Sha Dan has reached the state of being impenetrable by blades and spears?" She moved away tens of feet, but Yang Guo had not chased after her. She turned around; he was still by the fire, not moving an inch.

Lu Wushuang was suspicious and she called out, "Sha Dan... Sha Dan, I have something to say to you." Yang Guo did not reply. She took a careful look, and saw Yang Guo's body had formed a circle, it looked extremely strange, she boldly went over and saw that it did not look like the body of a person, she stretched out her hand and touched him, it felt like the clothes were placed on top of a rock. She grabbed the clothes and lifted up; indeed there was a large rock below. Where was Yang Guo?

She stood there for a while and called out, "Sha Dan, Sha Dan!" She didn't hear a reply so she listened carefully; there seemed to be a snoring noise coming from the house. She went over there quietly and saw Yang Guo sleeping on the table that she had just slept on. His back towards her and he was snoring loudly in a deep sleep.

Lu Wushuang was angry, and didn't even think about how he ended up sleeping on the table. She immediately leapt forward raising her saber, and pierced into his back.

The saber's tip had plunged into flesh but she didn't feel any resistance in her hands. She heard Yang Guo snore a few times and then said in his sleep, "Who's scratching my back, don't, don't, I'm scared."

Lu Wushuang turned pale, her arms quivered, thinking, "Is this person a demon?" She turned around to run but her legs

didn't listen. She then heard him say, "There must be a mouse on my back trying to steal my meat." He stretched out his hand to his back and took out a lump of meat, and threw it onto the ground.

Lu Wushuang finally breathed out and understood, "So that Sha Dan put the meat on his back and just now I stabbed into that, I've just suffered a fright for no reason."

She had failed twice to stab him and she hated him even more, she clenched her teeth and quietly said, "Rotten Sha Dan, see if I'm able to kill you this time." She dashed forward and raised her saber, then slashed down across his back. In the midst of the snoring, Yang Guo turned his body, the saber slashed down deeply into the wood. Lu Wushuang circulated her chi around her hands trying to remove the saber. Yang Guo pretended he was having a nightmare, "Mum, mum, the little mouse is biting me." His muddy legs shot out, the left leg striking Lu Wushuang's 'Crooked Reservoir' (qu chi) pressure point on the side of her body, his right leg landing on her shoulder sealing the 'Shoulder Well' (jian jing) pressure point. Those two points are two of two of the body's important pressure points. When those legs came out, of all the places to hit, they hit precisely those two places. Lu Wushuang wasn't able to move, she stood there, becoming a support for his legs.

Lu Wushuang was furious, although her body wasn't able to move, her mouth still could, she shouted out, "Hey Sha Dan, quickly move your stinky feet away." She just heard his snoring becoming louder. She didn't know what to do, in anger she opened her mouth and spat at him. Yang Guo moved his body; his right foot brushed across and struck her 'Large Bone' pressure point. Lu Wushuang's body immediately became numb all over, even her mouth wasn't able to open, the stench from his feet flowed into her nose.

In a short while, Lu Wushuang's anger stirred up again, and she swore to herself, "Tomorrow when my pressure points are unsealed, I'm going to chop up Sha Dan into seventeen or eighteen pieces."

After a while, Yang Guo felt that he'd had enough fun, he released his legs and turned around, although it was dark, he was still able to look at her angry expression clearly. The angrier she got, the more she looked like Xiao Longnu. Yang Guo stared at her in a daze, how would he be able to close his eyes? In actual fact, Lu Wushuang and Xiao Longnu did not look like each other. It's just that when girls get angry they all have a similar look. Yang Guo missed his master and looking at Lu Wushuang's angry expression reminded him of Xiao Longnu. It was like looking at a picture of her.

After a while, the moon was in the west, its light shooting into the room. Lu Wushuang saw Yang Guo's eyes were open, staring at her in a daze and shivered, "Could that Sha Dan be pretending to be mad? He sealed my pressure points, could it be that it wasn't an accident?" When she thought about this, she couldn't stop herself from breaking out in a cold sweat. At this moment in time, she saw Yang Guo's eyes looking at the floor; she followed his eyes and saw three shadows. There were three people standing at the entrance. She looked carefully and saw that the three shadows were holding weapons, she secretly cursed herself, "Crap, the enemy has to come now when Sha Dan has sealed my pressure points." Although she was suspicious, she couldn't believe that this dirty and humble farmer possessed a set of good martial arts.

Yang Guo closed his eyes and snored loudly. He heard someone call out from the door, "Little Bitch, come out, do you think this Taoist Master will let you off by standing still?"

Yang Guo thought, "Oh, it's him again."

Another person said, "We don't want your life, we just want to cut off your two ears and three fingers." The third person said, "This Old man is waiting for you outside; just get it over and done with." As they said this they moved outside. The three of them stood in a semi circle.

Yang Guo stretched up and slowly sat up and said, "Why are you calling outside, Miss Lu, you are here? Why are you standing there without moving?" He pushed her in the back a few times. Lu Wushuang felt a surge of strong chi running into her body, her body shook and the three pressure points in her body unsealed. She didn't bother thinking about what had happened and immediately got up and took up her saber. She leaped out of the house and saw three men with their backs facing the moon. She didn't say anything and flipped her wrist and thrust out at the person on the left. That person was holding a chain and saw the saber slashing towards him. His chain was heavy, its power was great and so was its accuracy. A clashing sound was heard as Lu Wushuang's saber flew out of her hand. Yang Guo was lying across the table and saw Lu Wushuang leap to the side, her left hand stretched out and thought, "Good, that Taoist will not be able to hold on to his sword." Indeed when her wrist turned up, she used the Ancient Tomb sect's kung fu, and she had taken the Taoist's sword. She chopped down, a 'pu' sound; the Taoist's shoulder had been struck by the sword.

Lu Wushuang used the sword and fought with the man who used the chain. The other short man held a spear; he pierced east and west, but was out of the order and stayed back. The man using the chain had good martial arts, after ten moves or so, Lu Wushuang gradually felt that she wouldn't be able to stand still. That person's steps seemed to be measured, he honored his status, Lu Wushuang had failed to get at him many times yet he didn't force the issue.

The Taoist wrapped up his wound, pointed at Lu Wushuang and cursed, "Ancient Tomb Bitch, such evil attacks!" He ran towards her attacking with his fists and legs. A white light glimmered; the Taoist's back was pierced by the sword. At that time, the short man thrust his spear at Lu Wushuang's back, and the man using the chain smashed down on her shoulders.

Yang Guo thought, "Oh no!" He picked up two stones and flicked them out, one at the spear, the other at the man's right wrist. He didn't know that the man was skilled, once the stone struck his wrist, he wasn't able to smash down with his chain, but his left palm came out like lightning and struck Lu Wushuang on the chest. Yang Guo was alarmed, he was young and inexperienced and wasn't able to tell that the man's fists and palms were good. He quickly dashed out and grabbed onto the man's neck, the man's body suddenly flew up and was flung away tens of feet. The Taoist and the short man saw that Yang Guo was powerful; they picked up the man and ran away without turning back.

Yang Guo lowered his head and took a look at Lu Wushuang, he saw that her face was golden and she was breathing weakly, her injury was serious. He put his arm around her back and slowly sat her up. He heard 'ge la' 'ge la', two light sounds, it was the sound of bones grinding. Two of her ribs had been broken by that man. She had passed out but once the bones moved, the pain was intense and woke her up; she gave out a quiet groan. Yang Guo said, "What is it? Does it hurt?"

Lu Wushuang was in extreme pain, she clenched her teeth and scolded, "Why are you asking? Of course it hurts. Carry me into the house."

When Yang Guo picked her up, it was unavoidable that there was going to be some movements. Lu Wushuang's ribs

touched each other and the pain ignited again, she scolded, "Fine, bastard Sha Dan, you...you want to torture me. Where have the three scoundrels gone?" When Yang Guo used his skills, she had already fainted and didn't know that it was him that saved her life.

Yang Guo laughed, and said, "They thought you were dead, they clapped and left."

Lu Wushuang scolded, "Why are you laughing? Bastard Sha Dan, the more pain I'm in the happier you are, is that it?" Every time she shouted at him, Yang Guo would remember how Xiao Longnu would scold him. He lived in the Tomb of the Living Dead for a few years with Xiao Longnu and it was the happiest time in his life. Each time Xiao Longnu scolded him; he couldn't help but be moved as he knew that his Master was treating him with her heart. At present he wasn't able to find his Master, but at this time when he was alone, he had at least bumped into another girl in white. In actual fact, Xiao Longnu was cold and detached; when she scolded him it was just a few calm words. How was she like Lu Wushuang who screamed and shouted out insults and curses? In Yang Guo's present state, having a young girl scolding him was better than having no one, he ignored her insults and curses and just smiled, he placed her on the table. When Lu Wushuang lay on the table, her broken ribs moved again, she couldn't endure the pain and called out. When she called out in pain her lungs breathed out and this disturbed the ribs again causing further pain. She clenched her teeth as cold sweat poured off her head.

Yang Guo said, "Shall I fix your ribs back in place for you?"

Lu Wushuang scolded, "Rotten Sha Dan, what bones do you know how to fix?"

Yang Guo said, "My dog at home fought with the neighbor's dog. Its bone was bitten in half and it was me who fixed his

bone back in place. Also, when Uncle Wang's sow had its rib broken, it was me who fixed it back into place."

Lu Wushuang was angry, but she didn't dare to shout out loudly, she huskily said, "You're calling me a sow, a dog. You're the dog, the sow."

Yang Guo laughed and said, "Even if I was a pig, I'd be a boar. Furthermore, that dog was a bitch; a male dog won't be like that."

Although Lu Wushuang was clever and quick with words, every time she spoke a word her chest would hurt, she wanted to argue with him but she had no strength left, she closed her eyes and endured the pain and ignored Yang Guo.

Yang Guo said, "Once I fixed that dog's bone it recovered after a few days. When it fought again, it was as if its bone had never been broken."

Lu Wushuang thought, "It could be that Sha Dan really knows how to connect bones. If no one heals me I'll be dead. But if he helps to fix my ribs, he's going to touch my chest, how can I let him? Hmm, if he doesn't cure me, then we'll die together, if he does cure me, I won't let one who's seen my body live."

She'd had a tragic life since she was young. She endured it and fought for her life. Her character was different to others; she had been with Li Mochou a long time, her ears and eyes had endured many things. She had learned Li Mochou's ruthless and vindictive streak and at such a young age she was already filled with many evil thoughts. She quietly said, "Fine! If you lie to me Sha Dan, your death will be painful."

Yang Guo thought, "If I don't make it hard for her now, I'm not going to have a chance again." He calmly said, "When Uncle Wang's sow broke its ribs, his daughter begged and

pleaded with me for help, she called me 'Big Brother' one hundred times, and then I helped her"

Lu Wushuang said, "Bull, bull, bull, rotten Sha Dan... rotten Sha Dan, ai ya" her chest was filled with severe pain again.

Yang Guo laughed and said, "If you won't call me that then fine. I'm going home now, have a nice rest." He got up and turned towards the door.

Lu Wushuang thought, "If that person goes, then I'm definitely going to die." She had to hold down her temper and said, "What do you want?"

Yang Guo said, "Originally, all I wanted was for you to call me 'Good Brother' one hundred times, but all along you have scolded and insulted me. I'll help you if you call me that one thousand times."

Lu Wushuang planned it in her heart, "I'll promise him now, once I get better, it won't be too late to get rid of him." So she said, "I'll call good brother, good brother, good brother ai ya ai ya"

Yang Guo said, "Fine, there are still nine hundred and ninety seven times left, remember that, you can finish it when you are better." He walked over to her, and stretched out his hand to take off her clothes.

Lu Wushuang automatically cringed back, she was alarmed and said, "Go away, just what are you doing?"

Yang Guo took a step back and said, "I don't know how to put your bone back in place with your clothes in the way, the dog and sow didn't have clothes when I fixed their bones."

Lu Wushuang thought this was funny but she would be embarrassed if she allowed him to take her clothes off. After

a while she lowered her head and quietly said, "Fine, I won't trouble you."

Yang Guo said, "If you don't want to be healed, then don't. I don't care..."

As he said this, he heard someone suddenly say from outside, "That little Bitch must be within twenty miles of here, we'll quickly search around here..." when Lu Wushuang heard this voice she immediately turned pale with fright, she didn't care about her pain and covered Yang Guo's mouth, the person who was talking outside was Li Mochou.

When Yang Guo heard this voice he too was alarmed. He heard the voice of another girl say, "The saber that was planted in that man's shoulder looked like the silver saber of apprentice sister, and it's a pity that we couldn't get it for a closer look." That person was Hong Lingbo.

After the two left the tomb, they returned to Scarlet Cloud Manor, and discovered that Lu Wushuang had escaped, Li Mochou wasn't too bothered, but they didn't expect that she had also stolen the 'Five Poison Codex'. When Li Mochou roamed Jianghu, what the martial artists of the Jianghu world were afraid of was not her kung fu, but her 'Divine Five Poison Palm' and her 'Soul Freezing Silver Needles'. In the 'Five Poison Codex', it had the types of poison, its concentration, the antidote and the processing technique of the 'Divine Five Poison Palm' and 'Soul Freezing Silver Needles'. If the secrets were leaked, the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' would be like a poisonous snake without its fangs. She had long ago memorized the contents of the codex; there was no need to take it with her, and she hid the codex in a secret place in the Scarlet Cloud Manor. But she didn't know that Lu Wushuang was especially aware and noticed every detail, and knew her master's hiding place. When she decided to escape, she took the book with her.

Li Mochou was furious; she took Hong Lingbo and chased after her night and day. But Lu Wushuang had left long ago, and she kept to the small roads. Li Mochou and her disciple went north and then south, she searched east to west, and then she went over the places again several times but still couldn't find any trace of her.

One night, by coincidence, the two of them were near Tongguan, and heard members of the Beggar Clan spreading news that there was going to be a meet for the members along the western roads. Li Mochou considered the fact that there are numerous Beggar Clan members everywhere, their ears and eyes see and hear everything; there must be someone who had seen Lu Wushuang. The two rushed to the meeting place to scout for news. On the way there they saw a fifth band disciple being carried by another Beggar Clan member, around them was seventeen or eighteen Beggar Clan members escorting them. Li Mochou saw the person had a saber in his back; it was Lu Wushuang's silver saber. She slipped to the side to listen in, and heard a few angry Beggar Clan members talking, saying that it was a lame little Bitch who did this. Li Mochou was delighted when she heard this, she knew that this person was recently wounded so she quickly left and scouted around, eventually coming up to the stone house. When she got there, she saw the remains of the fire and smell of fresh blood and under the moonlight she saw drops of blood on the floor, they were new stains. It displayed the signs of a recent battle. Li Mochou tugged her disciple's sleeve and pointed to the house. Hong Lingbo nodded; she took out her sword and charged in.

When Lu Wushuang heard the voices of her Master and apprentice sister she knew that she had ran out of luck, she decided to lay there and wait for her death. She heard the sound of the door, a person in yellow dashed in, it was her apprentice sister Hong Lingbo. Hong Lingbo had friendly sentiments towards her apprentice sister, but she knew that

this time her master would use every method that she knew to torture her and then slowly kill her. She saw that Lu Wushuang was lying on the table and thrust a sword at her chest to spare her the pain. As the sword tip was about to pierce her chest, Li Mochou stretched out her hand and patted Hong Lingbo's shoulder; her hand lost all her strength immediately and lowered.

Li Mochou chuckled, "Do you think I won't kill her? Why do I need you to rush into it?" She faced Lu Wushuang and said, "You see your Master in front of you and you don't greet her?" Although she was furious, her tone was normal.

Lu Wushuang thought, "Now that I'm in her clutches, even if I beg or plead, I'm going to suffer." She calmly said, "You and my family had deep feuds over the years, there is no need to say anything." Li Mochou stared at her; one couldn't tell if her eyes were filled with joy or hate. There was an expression of pity on Hong Lingbo's face. Lu Wushuang's lips curled up, her expression was one of pride.

The three of them stared at each other and after a while Li Mochou said, "Where's the book? Give it to me."

Lu Wushuang said, "An evil Taoist and a beggar took it!" Li Mochou was startled inside. Although she hasn't done anything to offend the Beggar Clan, she's had run ins with the Quanzhen. She knew that the Beggar Clan and the Quanzhen sect had a deep history; what's going to happen now that her book has fallen into outsiders hands? Lu Wushuang saw a wry smile on the face of her Master and knew that she was thinking up ideas of how to torture her. All along during her escape, the only thing she was afraid of was that her Master was going to catch up with her and now she has. Instead of first feeling fear she thought, "Where's Sha Dan? Where did he go?" She is facing death and when she thought about the ugly and dumb farmer, unwittingly she

felt a warm feeling inside her. Suddenly a light from a fire appeared, a rumbling sound was heard.

Li Mochou and Hong Lingbo turned around to see a large bull heading inside. On the bull's right horn there was a saber attached to it, on the left horn was a torch; the force it was approaching at was frightening. Li Mochou immediately leapt to the side but saw the bull turn around in the house and rush out. When the bull first entered it was dashing ferociously, when it left it rushed away with the same speed. In the wink of eye it had traveled tens of feet. Li Mochou looked at the image of the bull running away and at first wondered, "Who attached the saber and torch to the bull's horn?" She turned around and both she and Hong Lingbo called out in shock, the body of Lu Wushuang that was lying on the table had disappeared.

Hong Lingbo searched the house and leaped up onto the roof. Li Mochou thought that it must have something to do with the bull so she chased after it. In the darkness she saw the light of the torch on the bull's horn entering the forest. By the light of the torch she saw that no one was on the bull's back, Lu Wushuang had not escaped on the bull. She then thought, "It must be, someone outside sent the strange bull in to divert my attention and then rescued her." She didn't know which direction to chase after, she then sped up and in a flash she had caught up with the bull. She leaped up onto the bull and saw that there wasn't anything strange so she leapt down again. Then she kicked the bull in the behind. She whistled and signaled Hong Lingbo, one was going to scout north to south, the other west to east.

Of course it was Yang Guo who sent the bull into the house. When he heard the voices of Li Mochou and her disciple, he slipped out through the backdoor and listened in through the window, after just one sentence he knew that Li Mochou had come to take Lu Wushuang's life. He immediately thought of

a plan, he went over to the bull and attached the saber that Lu Wushuang had earlier dropped to the bull's horn, he then gathered some twigs and attached it to the other horn and lit them. He then hung below the bull and forced the bull to rush into the house; quickly he grabbed Lu Wushuang and hid underneath the bull, exiting the house. His movements were quick and the bull looked weird, Li Mochou had good eyesight but was caught unaware and didn't notice anything wrong. By the time Li Mochou had caught up with bull, Yang Guo had carried Lu Wushuang into the long grass and hid. When she moved, she was in severe pain, so all of the things that had happened; how Yang Guo rescued her, how they hid underneath the bull and how they dived into the grass was all unclear to her. After a while she regained her awareness and called out an 'ah' sound. Yang Guo quickly covered her mouth and whispered into her ear, "Don't make a noise!" They heard footsteps and Hong Lingbo's voice saying, "How can someone disappear in the flash of an eye?" Further away Li Mochou said, "Let's go. That little Bitch must have gone far away." They heard the footsteps of Hong Lingbo gradually moving away. Lu Wushuang was being smothered and was in pain. Yang Guo still held his hand over her mouth without loosening. Lu Wushuang struggled for a little. When she felt that she was being held in his arms she was embarrassed and anxious, she wanted to hit him.

Yang Guo whispered in her ear, "Don't move, your Master is lying." As soon as his words were said, they heard Li Mochou saying, "She really isn't here." Her voice was extremely close by; it seemed that they were right next to them.

Lu Wushuang was startled and thought, "If it weren't for Sha Dan, I would be dead!"

Li Mochou had suspected that she was hiding nearby. While she was talking far away, she immediately used her lightness

kung fu without making a sound and arrived close by. Lu Wushuang almost fell into the trap.

Yang Guo carefully listened, when the two had really gone he removed his hand and laughed, "There's no need to be scared now."

Lu Wushuang said, "Let me go."

Yang Guo lightly placed her flat onto the grass and said, "I'll immediately push your bones back into place and then we'll leave this place. If we wait until tomorrow we won't be able to escape." Lu Wushuang nodded.

Yang Guo was afraid that she would call out in pain when he pushes the bone back into place and alert Li Mochou and her disciple. He sealed her numbing pressure points and stretched out his hand to take off her clothes, and said, "Don't make a noise whatever you do."

After taking off her outer garment, a white undergarment was revealed, removing this revealed an apricot yellow brassiere. Yang Guo didn't dare to take it off and looked up, and saw Lu Wushuang's eyebrows wrinkled, her eyes closed tightly, she was embarrassed and scared. Yang Guo had his first awakening of lust; when he smelled the fragrant scent of a virgin girl, his heart pounded wildly.

Lu Wushuang opened her eyes and quietly said, "Just cure me!" After she said this, she closed her eyes again and turned away. Yang Guo's hand shook as he unbuttoned her underwear; when he saw her breasts, he didn't dare to touch her chest. Lu Wushuang waited a while but felt a cool breeze brushing across her naked chest, she felt cold and turned around opening her eyes, and saw Yang Guo looking at her in a daze, she angrily said, "What...What are you looking at?"

Yang Guo was startled; he stretched out his hand and touched her ribs, when his hand touched her skin he shivered, like as if his hand was touching a fire, he immediately pulled back.

Lu Wushuang said, "Quickly close your eyes, if you look at me again I'll... I'll..." When she said this, tears flowed from her eyes.

Yang Guo quickly said, "Yes, yes, I won't look anymore, don't cry." He closed his eyes and felt out the broken ribs and pushed them back into place, he quickly covered up her chest with her underwear and calmed down. He gathered four sticks and placed two across the front of her and two behind. He then got some vines and tied the sticks tightly into place so the bones won't move out of place. He then buttoned up her garments and unsealed her pressure points.

Lu Wushuang opened her eyes and saw the moonlight on Yang Guo's face. His cheeks were red, he was blushing, he looked at her face and their eyes met, he quickly turned away. Her bones were now fixed into place, although they still hurt, it wasn't as painful as before. She thought, "That Sha Dan does know how to seal pressure points." She now could see that Yang Guo isn't an ordinary person, he is definitely not a 'Sha Dan', but ever since she met him she had insulted him and looked down on him. Now she had seen him save her yet she didn't change the way she talked to him.

She asked, "Sha Dan, what do you think we should do now? Shall we wait here or run away and hide."

Yang Guo said, "What do you think?"

She replied, "Of course we should run. Are we going to wait here for our death?"

Yang Guo said, "Where?"

Lu Wushuang said, "I want to go Jiangnan. Can you accompany me there?"

Yang Guo said, "I need to find my Gu Gu, I can't go far."

When Lu Wushuang heard this, her face dropped and said, "Fine, leave! Let me die here."

If Lu Wushuang had kindly asked him Yang Guo would of course reject her request, but when he saw her angry face, it reminded him of Xiao Longnu. It was hard for him to reject her and he thought, "Maybe Gu Gu headed south, if I escort Miss Lu there, maybe good deeds will be repaid, and the heavens might pity me and let me see Gu Gu again." He knew that this was a remote possibility but he had no way to reject Lu Wushuang's request, so he convinced himself, sighed, and then picked her up.

Lu Wushuang angrily said, "Why are you picking me up?"

Yang Guo laughed, "I'm carrying you to Jiangnan."

Lu Wushuang gave a smile and was delighted, she said, "Sha Dan, Jiangnan is far from here, can you carry me all the way there?" Though she said this, she was leaning on Yang Guo peacefully without moving.

The large bull had disappeared. Yang Guo was afraid that they might bump into Li Mochou and her disciple so he kept to the small paths. Although his legs were quick, his upper body did not move and did not disturb Lu Wushuang's wound. Lu Wushuang saw the trees by her recede, he was hurrying along the path like a dashing horse. He was much faster than she would be without carrying anything. His lightness kung fu was not below her Master's; she was curious and thought, "So this Sha Dan is highly skilled, how could he learn to such a level at such a young age?"

Not long after, the east began to lighten, she lifted her head and saw that although his face was dirty, he was handsome, his eyes captivating, and her heart was moved. She gradually forgot about the pain and after a while she fell into a deep sleep.

When the sky became bright, Yang Guo felt a little tired, he dashed over to a large tree and placed her gently down, and then rested next to her. Lu Wushuang opened her eyes and smiled, she said, "I'm hungry, aren't you hungry?"

Yang Guo said, "Of course I'm hungry, let's find a restaurant and get something to eat." He got up and picked her up again, but because he had carried her for half the night his arms felt numb so he lifted her onto his shoulders and slowly walked.

Lu Wushuang's legs were bouncing off lightly off Yang Guo's chest, she laughed and said, "Sha Dan, what exactly is your name? If you don't tell me I'll call you Sha Dan in front of others."

Yang Guo said, "I don't have a name, everyone calls me Sha Dan."

Lu Wushuang hurtfully said, "If you don't want to say, fine! Who's your Master?"

When Yang Guo heard the word 'Master', he didn't dare mess around because he respected Xiao Longnu so much, he turned serious and said, "My Master is my Gu Gu."

Lu Wushuang believed him and thought, "So his skills are passed on from his family." She asked again, "What family or sect is your Gu Gu from?"

Yang Guo dumbly said, "I don't know whether she is at home or what rank she is." (Yang Guo is playing on her words, the

word for family can also mean home, the word for sect can also mean order.)

Lu Wushuang angrily said, "You idiot! I ask you, from whose school of martial arts have you learned?"

Yang Guo said, "Are you asking about my family's main door? It's made out of wood." (Again, a play on words)

Lu Wushuang's heart sank and thought, "Could this person really be a Sha Dan (Dumb Egg / idiot)? His martial arts are good but he's dumb?" So she softly said, "Sha Dan, tell me honestly, why did you save my life."

Yang Guo couldn't think of a reply, after a while he said, "My Gu Gu told me to save you so I saved you."

Lu Wushuang said, "Who is your Gu Gu?"

Yang Guo said, "Gu Gu is Gu Gu. Whatever she tells me to do I'll do it."

Lu Wushuang sighed, and thought, "This person really is dumb." She had some warm feelings for him but now they turned into loathing.

Yang Guo didn't hear her say anything and said, "Why aren't you speaking?"

Lu Wushuang gave a grunt. Yang Guo asked again.

Lu Wushuang angrily said, "If I don't want to speak, I won't speak! Sha Dan, shut your mouth!"

Yang Guo knew that her face right now was a nice sight, but since she is sitting on his shoulders he wasn't able to see, he couldn't help but think, "What a pity."

Not long after, they reached a little town. Yang Guo found a restaurant and ordered rice and dishes, and the two sat down together. Lu Wushuang smelled the stench of cow shit on him

and wrinkled her eyebrows, and said, "Sha Dan, sit over there, don't sit at my table."

Yang Guo laughed and sat at another table. Lu Wushuang saw that he was still looking at her, she was vexed, the more she looked at him the more loathsome he was, she hid her face and said, "Don't look at me." She pointed at a faraway table and said, "Sit over there."

Yang Guo gave a laugh and grabbed his bowl and sat at the entrance of the inn, and ate his rice.

Lu Wushuang said, "That's better." Although she was hungry, her chest hurt, it was hard to swallow. She felt an urge to take her anger out on Yang Guo but he sat faraway, she wasn't able to shout at him. Just as she was feeling troubled some people were outside singing, "Little Miss do good deeds." Another person followed, "Give the beggar a bowl of rice!"

Lu Wushuang raised her head and saw four beggars outside lined up all looking at her, she could tell from their eyes that they had come with ill intentions; she was secretly alarmed. She heard the third beggar singing, "The path of heaven is not for you!" The fourth one sang, "Hell has no doors yet you've entered through!" The four beggars were singing the 'Lotus Falling' begging tune, each one holding a bowl in their right hand and a stick in their left. There were four coarse pockets on their shoulders. Lu Wushuang once heard her apprentice sister say that the Beggar Clan members use the coarse pockets to differentiate between rank within the clan, fourth band members will have four pockets, these beggars were fourth band members. She remembered how she fought beggars Han and Chen yesterday at Wolf Valley, they had five pockets; it seems they were a level higher than these people in front of her. If she wasn't injured, she wouldn't fear the beggars; now she hardly had the strength to pick up

chopsticks. How could she fight the enemy? Sha Dan's lightness kung fu maybe excellent, but he acts mad. Even if he knows martial arts it won't be too high a level. She couldn't help but be at a wits end.

Yang Guo was worrying about his stomach; it was as if he hasn't seen the beggars yet. After he finished his bowl he went over to the rice bucket and filled another, he stretched out his hand and picked a fish up from the plates in front of Lu Wushuang, the soup and juices of the fish spilled all over the table, he laughed foolishly and said, "Ha-ha, I'm going to eat a fish."

Lu Wushuang frowned slightly; she had no time to scold him. She heard the four beggars sing again, singing 'Little Miss' again. The four beggars repeated this three times, the eight eyes all fixed on her. Lu Wushuang didn't know how to deal with them, she slowly spooned the rice, pretending that she didn't hear but she was extremely worried inside.

One of the beggars loudly called out, "Little Miss, if you won't spare a bowl of rice, then how about sparing a curved saber." Another one said, "Come with us and we won't make it hard for you. We just want to clear a few things up and come to a fair conclusion." After a while someone said, "Just quickly come, do you really want us to use force?" Lu Wushuang thought that it would be no use whether she replied or kept quiet; she didn't know what to do. The fourth beggar said, "We won't use force against you, the heroes of Jianghu would laugh at the four of us for bullying a little girl, we just want you to come along and talk." From their tone, Lu Wushuang knew that they were about to attack, she knew that it would be hard for her to fight them off, yet she couldn't wait for defeat. Her left hand held the bench, when the enemy came she would use the bench to fight them off.

Yang Guo thought, "Time for me to do my stuff!" He ran over to Lu Wushuang's table and picked up the bowl of soup, his

mouth was biting down on the fish, he mumbled, "I'm...I'm going to spill the soup!" The bowl tipped and half the hot soup spilled on the Lu Wushuang's right arm. She was facing east, her arm was slightly inwards, and when the soup came she immediately pulled back and turned around to take a look.

Yang Guo called out, "Ai Ya!" He used his right arm and wiped her arm and leg and at the same time, his left hand waved, four bamboo chopsticks flew out, each one shooting out at the beggars. The four chopsticks were extremely fast; before the beggars could see it their arms were in pain, a crashing sound was heard as four bowls crashed onto the floor. Yang Guo used his garment and wiped Lu Wushuang's sleeve continuously and said, "Don't...don't get angry...I'll...I'll...I'll wipe it clean."

Lu Wushuang scolded, "Don't mess around!" She turned around to look at the beggars and was alarmed. She saw the backs of the beggars going around the street corner and disappearing, the floor covered with the remains of broken bowls.

Lu Wushuang questioned, "Those four beggars are strange; why did they leave all of a sudden?" She saw Yang Guo's hands was filled with fish soup and vegetable sauce, and was wiping frantically on the table, she scolded, "Go away, aren't you embarrassed?"

Yang Guo said, "Yes, yes!" He wiped his hands on his clothes.

Lu Wushuang frowned and asked, "Why did the four beggars go?"

Yang Guo said, "They saw you were short tempered and wouldn't spare anything, there wasn't any use in begging anymore so they left." Lu Wushuang pondered for a while and didn't understand, she took out some money and told

Yang Guo to buy a donkey with it. After she paid her bills she got on the donkey. As soon as she got on the donkey, her ribs moved and she shouted out in pain.

Yang Guo said, "It's a pity that I'm dirty and smelly, otherwise I could support you."

Lu Wushuang said, "Humph, still talking crap." She pulled on the rope, the donkey was extremely stubborn, and it leaned against the wall and forced her against the wall as well. Lu Wushuang had no strength in her arms and legs, she called out and fell off the donkey. Her right leg landed on the ground and slowly stood up, her wound was disturbed again and she was in pain. She angrily shouted, "You saw me fall yet you didn't help me."

Yang Guo said, "I'm dirty."

Lu Wushuang said, "Can't you wash first?" Yang Guo gave a stupid laugh and didn't say anything.

Lu Wushuang said, "Help me get on the donkey." Yang Guo did as he was told and helped her onto the donkey. As soon as the donkey felt someone on its back it immediately started to buck. Lu Wushuang said, "Quickly lead the donkey."

Yang Guo said, "No, I'm scared that the donkey is going to kick me. It would be better if it was my bull."

Lu Wushuang was exasperated and thought, "He's not completely stupid. Obviously he wants to hold on to me." She had no alternative and could only say, "Fine, you can ride on the donkey as well."

Yang Guo said, "Remember you told me, don't shout at me for being dirty and smelly."

Lu Wushuang said, "Yes, why are you wasting time?"

Yang Guo laughed and climbed onto the back of the donkey, his arms gathered around her, he kicked with a bit of strength in his legs, the donkey felt pain and didn't dare to cause trouble anymore and obediently walked forward. Yang Guo said, "Which way are we going?"

Lu Wushuang had already planned out her route, she wanted to go east through Tongguan and then through Zhongzhou and then go south following the main road. But after seeing the four beggars, she knew that she would encounter more Beggar Clan members along the way so she thought about going along the small paths. Go through the bamboo forest and towards Colt Dragon Stockade and then south via Purple Meadow. Although this would make the journey longer, it was a lot safer and it would be harder for her Master to catch up with her. After pondering for a while she pointed southeast and said, "That way."

The donkey trotted along slowly, as soon as they left the town, a small child rushed up to them and called out, "Miss Lu, I have something for you." As she said this she flung a flower to them, and then turned around and ran away. Lu Wushuang stretched out her hand and caught it, and saw a letter wrapped around it, she quickly opened the envelope and saw a yellow piece of paper, it read; "Your Master will be here shortly, quickly hide!" The yellow paper was coarse but the writing on it was elegant. Lu Wushuang gave out an alarmed shout, she pondered, "Who is that little kid? How does he know my name is Lu? And how do they know that my Master is going to be here shortly?" She asked Yang Guo, "You know that child don't you? It was your Gu Gu who sent him isn't it?"

Yang Guo had already read the letter from behind her and thought, "That kid was just a normal country kid, he must have been ordered to take the letter to us by someone. But who wrote the letter? It looks like it has good intentions. If Li

Mochou really caught up, what should I do?" Although he had learned the "Jade Heart Manual" and "Nine Yin Manual", and possessed two of the greatest skills in the world of Wulin, he had only practiced them for a short time. Though he understood the essence behind them his internal energy wasn't deep enough. If Li Mochou caught up he would not be a match for her and in broad daylight there wasn't anywhere to hide. He was pondering but had no idea. When Lu Wushuang asked him he replied, "I don't know that little Sha Dan, but my Gu Gu did not send that kid."

As soon as he said this, he heard a noise; ahead was a carriage. Tens of people were crowding and pushing around; there was a wedding taking place. Although it was the countryside, the event was done with an extravagant air; it was done with much enthusiasm and energy.

A thought suddenly popped up in Yang Guo's mind, he asked, "Do you want to be a bride?"

End of Chapter 8.

Chapter 9 - A Hundred Ideas to Avoid the Enemy

Translated by Noodles



Lu Wushuang seemed to still feel the pain of her broken ribs in her dreams. When Yang Guo saw her face like this he immediately remembered Xiao Long Nu and then remembered the oath he swore. He broke out in a cold sweat and two slapping sounds were heard, he had slapped himself heavily across his cheeks.

Lu Wushuang was frightened at this moment in time, when she heard him ask such a stupid question she angrily said, "Sha Dan! What the hell are you talking about?"

Yang Guo laughed and said, "Let's play bride and groom. Why don't you pretend to be a bride? Won't that be beautiful? With a red veil covering your face, when people look they won't see your face."

Lu Wushuang was startled and said, "You're instructing me to pretend to be a bride to avoid my master?"

Yang Guo laughed and said, "I don't know, you pretend to be a bride and I'll be the groom."

This was an urgent matter, Lu Wushuang had no time to scold him, she thought, "Sha Dan's idea is a strange one, but apart from this idea, there's nothing else." She asked, "How should we do it?"

Yang Guo didn't want to waste time, he lashed the donkey and it hurried forward. The small roads of the countryside were tight and narrow, with eight people carrying the sedan chair lining up along the road; the two groups had nowhere to pass. When the people saw the donkey charging forward they all shouted, telling the riders to rein it in and slow down. Yang Guo squeezed his legs, and urged the donkey to go even faster, in a flash it had come up to the crowd. Two strong men had earlier stepped up wanting to pull the donkey back so that it won't knock into the sedan chair. Yang

Guo's rope lashed out and wrapped around the two men's arms, he raised his arm and let go, the two men fell onto the ground. He turned around to Lu Wushuang and said, "I want to be a groom." He leaned forward and stretched out his hand to grab the groom who was riding on a white horse. The groom was about seventeen or eighteen years of age, he was fitted out with new clothes and with gold flowers on his head; the sudden grab by Yang Guo frightened him. Yang Guo lifted his body and flung him up, his body flew up over a distance of ten feet, when he was about to land, the people shouted and called out, stretching out their arms to catch him. There were about thirty people who were helping to celebrate, half of them were tall strong men of Guanxi but when they saw his skills and the groom in his hands, how did they dare attack? An experienced old man dashed up; thinking it was bandits, he said, "Please spare the groom Da Wang (king). The amount of money that Da Wang wants, we can discuss it."

Yang Guo turned around to Lu Wushuang and said, "Wifey, why are they calling me Da Wang? My surname is Da? I think he's even more stupid than me."

Lu Wushuang said, "Don't waste time, I think I can hear the bell of my master's donkey."

Yang Guo was startled, he listened carefully, and indeed he could hear a faint ringing sound. He thought, "She's quick." He then said, "Ling Zi (Bell) What Ling Zi? It's a sweets seller? Great, let's buy some sweets to eat." He turned around to the old man and said, "If you listen to my instructions then I'll let you go, otherwise" he lifted up the groom and threw him up in the air. The groom was so frightened that he began to cry. The old man made a bow and said, "We'll do as Da Wang instructs."

Yang Guo pointed to Lu Wushuang and said, "That's my little Wifey, when she saw that someone was getting married she thought that it was amusing, she herself wants to take part too."

Lu Wushuang scolded, "Sha Dan, what did you say?"

Yang Guo ignored her and said, "Quickly take the bride's clothes and put them on her, I'll be the groom."

It's not unusual for kids to pretend to be a bride and groom. But who would think that a bandit on a narrow road would suddenly want to play this game? The people all looked at each other in dismay, and refused. Looking at the two, one was a young man, the other was a young girl, and one could describe them as a married couple. But the crowd of people didn't care. Yang Guo heard the ringing of the bell getting closer so he leapt off the donkey and placed the groom on the saddle letting Lu Wushuang guard him and went over to the sedan chair, he pushed aside the curtain and pulled the bride out. The bride screeched out in fright, her face was covered with a red veil and didn't know what was happening outside. Yang Guo brushed aside her red veil and saw a face like the moon, a face full of joy. He laughed and said, "The bride is beautiful." He lightly touched her cheek. The bride froze in fright and didn't make a sound.

Yang Guo's left hand held up the bride and called out, "If you want me to spare her, quickly take her clothes and give them to my Wifey to wear."

Lu Wushuang heard the ringing of her master's donkey getting closer, she gave him a stare and thought, "That Sha Dan doesn't know how high the sky is or how deep the earth is and his mouth is still joking at this time?" She heard the old man following his instructions, "Quick, quick! Quickly change the bride's clothes." The nanny accompanying the bride quickly took off her phoenix headdress and her bridal

costume and dressed Lu Wushuang with them. Taking off the groom's costume, Yang Guo changed himself. He turned around to Lu Wushuang and said, "Good Wifey, enter the sedan chair." Lu Wushuang told the bride to enter the sedan chair first and then she entered, lowering the curtain afterwards.

Yang Guo took a look at his grass shoes and wanted to change them when he heard the ringing sound from just around the bend in the road, he called out, "Turn around and head in a southeast direction, quickly! If someone comes and asks about us don't say you've seen us." He leapt onto the white horse and rode along with the groom on the donkey. When the crowd saw the couple had fallen into their hands, they didn't dare to disobey; they raised their gongs and cymbals and started their tune.

The sedan chair was picked up and turned around but after about a hundred feet, the ringing sound was becoming quicker, two donkeys trotted after them. Lu Wushuang was thinking about whether she would be able to escape from this danger and heard the now much closer ringing sound; her heart jumped and she carefully listened to the activities of outside.

Yang Guo pretended to be embarrassed and lowered his head looking at the horse's neck. He heard Hong Lingbo call out, "Hey, have you seen a lame girl walking past here?"

The old man from the crowd called out, "No...no..."

Hong Lingbo asked again, "Have you seen a girl on an animal pass by?"

The old man said, "No." The two passed the crowd and rushed on by. After a short while the two pulled the donkeys around and returned. Li Mochou's fly whisk flew out and wrapped around the sedan chair curtain, she pulled back and

after a 'chi' sound, the curtain ripped in half. Yang Guo was alarmed and rushed forward, as soon as the fly whisk comes out a second time he will make his move and rescue her. He didn't know that after one look in the sedan chair, Li Mochou would smile and say, "The bride is handsome." She raised her head and said to Yang Guo, "Little punk, your luck isn't bad." Yang Guo lowered his head not daring to face her, but heard them trotting away.

Yang Guo wondered, "Why did she spare Miss Lu?" He opened the sedan chair curtain only to see the bride scared out of her wits, and Lu Wushuang had disappeared. Yang Guo was even more baffled and called out, "Ai Ya, where's my Wifey gone?"

Lu Wushuang laughed and said, "I've disappeared." He saw the bride's dress move and Lu Wushuang darted out; she had hidden underneath the bride's gown. She knew that her master was very meticulous and careful, she would examine all possibilities; she knew that her master would come back so she hid.

Yang Guo said, "You can relax and be the bride from now on, sitting in the sedan chair is much more comfortable than riding on the donkey."

Lu Wushuang nodded and said to the bride, "You are suffocating me, quickly get out." The bride could do nothing and exited the sedan chair and rode on the donkey that was previously ridden by Lu Wushuang. The bride and the groom had never met before, the groom saw that the bride was healthy and attractive, the bride saw the groom and she too was pleased. The two were delighted even with their fear, and soon forgot that they were being held hostage by a bandit.

They walked on for about twenty li (10 km/6.2 miles) and the sky gradually became dark. The old man kept on pleading

with Yang Guo to let them go in case they missed the wedding's lucky period.

Yang Guo scolded, "Why are you so annoying?" As soon as he said this, something flashed by the roadside and two people hurried into the forest. Yang Guo was suspicious and chased after them. Indeed he saw the backs of two people, their clothes were old and torn, and they looked like beggars. Yang Guo reigned in his horse and thought, "Could the Beggar Clan have seen through us and set up a trap ahead? But at this moment in time, all we can do is head forward."

Not long after, the sedan chair caught up with him. Lu Wushuang poked her head out and asked, "What did you see?"

Yang Guo said, "Your curtain is torn and your face is not covered by the red veil. To be a proper bride one must cry and sob, even if the bride wants to get married, tears should flow and noses should run, calling out for your father and mother but not daring to leave. Where can you find such an unabashed bride as you under heaven's skies?" Lu Wushuang heard his words and understood the meaning behind it, their movements seemed to have been discovered. She lightly called out 'Sha Dan' and didn't say anymore. After a while the mountain path in front of them became steep, narrow and rugged, the people leading the procession were extremely tired long ago but didn't say anything in case they incurred Yang Guo's wrath.

In the wink of the eye the sun was now above the mountain, crows screeched as they flew in the sky. Suddenly, voices were heard around the mountain, they were singing, "Little Miss do a good deed, please spare us a silver saber."

Lu Wushuang's face turned pale, and she thought, "So the four beggars are hiding around here."

After the sedan chair turned a corner, three men could be seen in front of them, they were beggars. They were tall and strongly built; they were completely different to the four beggars they previously encountered.

Yang Guo saw that there were five pockets on their shoulders and thought, "These three five pocket beggars must be better than the other four, it looks like I'm going have to use my real skills."

The crowd carrying the couple had waited impatiently, one of them had taken a whip and lashed out at one of the beggars calling out, "Move out of the way... move out of the way!" The beggar did not move, he held the tip of the whip and pulled, the person holding the whip fell down. If this happened normally the crowd of people would have rushed up, but they had been frightened by Yang Guo previously and all thought, "So the three beggars are with him." No one dared to move forward and instead took a few steps back.

One of the beggars clearly said, "Congratulations Miss, little beggar here just want to beg for some money."

Lu Wushuang quietly said, "Sha Dan, I'm injured at the moment and can't fight, get rid of them for me."

Yang Guo said, "Fine."

He galloped forward on his horse and said, "Today is my wife's special day, she doesn't want any beggars to spoil it, now move." One of the beggars took a few glances at Yang Guo but couldn't recognize him from anywhere. The four beggars who had been struck in the wrist by the chopsticks all thought it was Lu Wushuang who did this and so did not tell their Martial Uncles about Yang Guo.

One of the beggars waved out his right hand. Yang Guo's horse was frightened and reared up. Yang Guo pretended to

wobble and fell off the back of the horse and didn't pick himself up for a long time. The three beggars all thought, "So that person really is the groom."

The Beggar Clan is a righteous and chivalrous clan; they have always helped the weak against the strong and aided those who were in danger. They had only decided to go after Lu Wushuang because she hurt a member of their clan. When they saw Yang Guo falling onto the ground and didn't seem to know ANY martial arts they all felt apologetic, one of the beggars stretched out a hand to pull him up and said, "Sorry."

Yang Guo mumbled, "What's wrong with you people, if you want to beg for money then beg for money, why are you scaring my horse." He took out some change and handed it out. The three beggars thanked him according to the clan's rules.

Yang Guo laughed and said to Lu Wushuang, "You told me to give them money, I've already done it."

Lu Wushuang angrily said, "What use is there of pretending to be stupid to me?"

Yang Guo said, "Yes, yes!" He stepped to the side and brushed off the dirt off his body.

Lu Wushuang saw the three beggars were still blocking the way, she calmly said, "What do you want?"

One of the beggars said, "Miss is a skilled fighter of the Ancient Tomb sect, the three of us admire your skills and want a few pointers."

Lu Wushuang said, "I have a serious wound, how can I fight with you? If you don't like it, then we can arrange a later date and test out each other's skills after my injury has healed. You are skilled fighters of the Beggar Clan, today you are

ganging up on an injured young girl; can you still call yourself a hero?"

After hearing her words, the three beggars felt that they were indeed in the wrong. Two of them said, "Fine! We'll come back for you after your wound has recovered."

The other beggar said, "Wait, where exactly are you injured? You have to let me take a look to see whether it's real or fake. If it is a real wound then I'll spare you today."

He didn't know that she was hurt in the chest; his words had no harmful intentions. But Lu Wushuang's cheeks immediately turned red, and couldn't stop herself from being angry. Feeling this anger she wasn't able to think of anything to say, after half a minute she scolded, "In Jianghu the Beggar Clan is known to be heroic and chivalrous, this is a lie, you people are in fact shameless scoundrels."

When the three heard her denigrate the Beggar Clan's name their faces immediately changed, one of them was rash and impatient; he dashed forward, stretching out his hand wanting to grab her out of the sedan chair. Yang Guo saw that the situation had become urgent, he called out, "Wait... wait. You lot asked for money, I gave you money, why are you still arguing with my wife?" He dashed forward in front of the sedan chair and said, "Although you three are beggars now, according to your faces you will become rich and become officials in the future, how can you do such disgraceful things and treat my new wife with such disrespect?"

The three beggars were startled and had no reply. The impulsive beggar said, "Move out of the way, we just want to test out the Ancient Tomb's kung fu, who's bullying who?" He lightly pushed out his hand. Yang Guo called out loudly and dropped to the side. The Beggar Clan has a rule, one must not hit out at someone who doesn't know martial arts. The beggar didn't know that this groom was so useless, just a

light push and he fell onto the ground. If he was seriously hurt he would be punished within the clan and the other two would not be able to escape punishment as well. The three of them were startled and went over to pick him up.

Yang Guo shouted and called out, "Ai Ya, Ai Yo, mum!" The three beggars could not see clearly if he was hurt or not.

Yang Guo called out in pain and said, "You three are stupid, my wife is shy; how can she speak to strangers? And about this, what do you want to test out? First tell me. I'll then go and ask my wife and then come back to speak with you, is that alright?" The three of them saw that he was dumb but not stupid, they had had enough of this but it wasn't suitable to attack him. The oldest of the beggars thought, "That Lu girl is pretending to be a bride; if that young man really is the groom then he should help her. But if he is pretending to be a groom then he shouldn't be so useless." He carefully studied him but couldn't find anything wrong. The impulsive beggar waved out his hand and shouted, "Are you going to move?"

Yang Guo spread out his two hands and loudly said, "You can't harm my wife."

Another beggar said, "Miss Lu, are you ordering this Sha Dan to block for you, could it be that you think we won't be able to get to you with this obstruction? Just get it over with and come out here."

Yang Guo said, "Oh, you know that I'm called Sha Dan, how strange."

The impulsive beggar faced Lu Wushuang and said, "We don't have to fight, we just want to see how you used your saber to hack into someone's shoulder, what is this move called?"

Lu Wushuang knew that Yang Guo was trying to annoy them but without results, she was thinking about how to escape when she heard the beggar's question and replied without thinking, "It's called "The Mink greets the Moon", what about it?"

Yang Guo interrupted and said, "Correct, once my wife's saber comes out, with a 'fu' sound, it will be in your shoulder." His right hand extended out and found its way to the beggar's shoulder. He pushed downwards and the palm of his hand lightly touched the shoulder. When the three beggars saw this move they were all startled, and all thought, "He pretended to be a fake groom all along to trick us."

Although Yang Guo had not put any strength into his palm, the impulsive beggar who was struck felt embarrassed, and called out, "Fine, you scoundrel, pretending to be dumb, come, let me first test out your skills."

Yang Guo said, "You said you wanted to fight with my wife first, why do you want to fight with me now?"

The beggar angrily said, "It's all the same if I fight with you."

Yang Guo said, "Oh no, I don't know what to do." He turned around to Lu Wushuang and said, "My darling wife, my little Wifey, tell me what should I do to them?"

Lu Wushuang was beyond doubt now, she knew that he must be highly skilled, the palm he had just demonstrated was crisp and clean, she couldn't manage something like that but she didn't know what his martial arts origins were so she just said, "Do another stance of "The Mink greets the Moon" (diao chan bai yue)."

Yang Guo said, "Fine!" He bent his waist and extended his hand, a clapping sound was heard as he struck down on the

beggar's shoulder again. The three beggars were astonished with that last attack. Yang Guo was definitely facing away from them and he didn't take a step to turn around, all he did was stretch out his hand and the chop came down on the Beggar's shoulder; that palm technique was extremely strange.

Lu Wushuang's heart shook, "That's definitely my Ancient Tomb sect's kung fu, how does he know it?" She then said, "A stance of 'The West Offers the Heart' (Xi Shi Peng Xin)."

Yang Guo said, "Alright!" His left fist came out, and landed on his opponent's chest. The beggar who was struck in the chest felt a strong force pushing him forward; he couldn't stop himself from flying away about a ten feet. He struggled to stay on his feet but the area of his chest where he was struck was not in pain, it was if someone had carried him and placed him further away. The other two beggars dashed up.

Yang Guo called out urgently, "Wifey, I don't know how to deal with them, teach me."

Lu Wushuang said, "The Illustrious Gentlemen Pushes Out" (zhao jun chu sai), "The Numb Nun Offers Life" (ma gu xian shou)."

Yang Guo's left hand rose and slanted, the fingers on his right hand stretched out, his form was in the position of strumming a zither, his five fingers flicked out at the beggar on the right, this was "The Illustrious Gentlemen Pushes Out". He immediately moved across and kicked the beggar on the left, his fists came together and pushed upwards, a clashing sound was heard as his fists struck the opponent's jaw. He then called out, "This is 'The Numb Nun Offers Life', isn't it?" He didn't want to hurt anyone so he didn't put any strength behind his attacks.

The four stances he used were all exquisite stances of the Ancient Tomb's "Beauty Fist Techniques". Ever since Lin Chaoying founded the Ancient Tomb sect, all the arts were passed on to females, never males. Lin Chaoying's "Beauty Fist Technique" took the names of famous beauties for the name of its stances. When it is used it is elegant, graceful and enchanting, yet it was deadly at the same time. Yang Guo learned martial arts from Xiao Longnu so of course he learned this set of fist techniques. He felt that although it was a refined set of skills, its nature meant that when a man practiced it, it wasn't appealing. When he was practicing he inadvertently changed its soft nature to hard and yang; its changes became swift and stylish, though the nature of it was slightly different, the technique of this set of fists remained intact.

The three beggars were all struck by the stances without knowing what happened but they didn't feel any pain from the stances. They weren't in awe of Yang Guo's skills; they whistled and attacked all at once. Yang Guo dodged to the east and darted to the west, he called out, "Wifey, it looks like it's becoming desperately serious; you are going to be a widow today!"

Lu Wushuang scoffed and said, "Heaven's Grandson Weaves Cotton"! (tian sun zhi mian).

Yang Guo's right hand wiped his left, his left pushed the right, and his stance resembled a loom weaving cloth, one scatter one push; his hands struck the beggars on the shoulders again.

Lu Wushuang called out again, ""The Civil Gentlemen as a Stove" (wen jun dang lu), "The Concubine is Drunk" (gui fei zui jiu)!"

Yang Guo raised his hand as if he was pouring wine and cut down on the impulsive beggar's forehead and caught his

body; he twisted him around and flung him out to the right, his shoulder hitting another beggar squarely in the chest. The three beggars were alarmed and angry, the three of them used the kung fu they had obtained throughout their lives, yet now they couldn't even touch this kid's clothes. The boy looked and his hand waved out, whoever he wanted to hit he struck; although it wasn't painful when they were hit, it was extremely weird.

Lu Wushuang called out three stances in a row, "'Foolish Jade Blows the Flute' (nong yu chui xiao), 'The Descending Goddess Encroaches the Wave' (luo shen ling bo), 'Enticing Shoot Holding Fist' (gou yi wo quan)." Yang Guo did as he was told. Lu Wushuang was in awe, she deliberately gave him a hard stance, as Yang Guo was throwing out his fist, she immediately called out, "'Ruling Sky Hangs' (ze tian chui)." According to his form at the moment, it was impossible to use this stance, but because Yang Guo's internal energy was much higher than the enemy's, he actually managed it; his body went forward, his palms hanging down. The three beggars saw that his chest was exposed and there was a weakness, they were delighted and dashed forward, but they didn't know that his internal energy would hold them back and force them to retreat a few steps.

Lu Wushuang was pleasantly surprised and called out, "'One Laugh Overturns the Country' (yi xiao qing guo)!" This was a stance that she had just invented. A captivating beauty could overturn cities and countries with a smile, but how could this be used to fight with others?

Yang Guo was startled; he immediately laughed out loud, "Ha-ha-ha-ha, hei-hei-hei-hei, hu-hu-he-he", and circulated the profound internal energy of the "Nine Yin Manual". Although he hadn't refined this internal energy to a good level that could be used to fight off skilled fighters, the three band five beggars were just run of the mill fighters. When

they heard this strange laugh, they couldn't stop their heads from shaking and eyes from being dazzled; their bodies shook a few times and they fell down onto the ground. Every person has a moon shaped small object in their ear which controls the person's balance, if this object is forced to shake, headaches and feeling light headed will be unavoidable. Eventually they won't be able to stand upright. Yang Guo's laugh was created by his strong internal energy, everyone's eardrums were being shaken continuously, and it was like the earth and sky were flipping over. Lu Wushuang felt faint and urgently grabbed onto the carriage to support herself. Calls of 'ai ya' and thudding noises all sounded together, the well wishers of the wedding, the bride and groom all fell onto the ground.

Yang Guo's laughter stopped, the three beggars got up, their faces grey and they ran away without turning their heads back. The rest of the party rested for half an hour and then carried the sedan chair on, now they treated Yang Guo's order as words from the gods, they didn't dare to revolt.

At 'er geng shi fen' (I assume its nine o'clock in the evening) they reached a town and Yang Guo let the people go. The people knew that they would be detained after being captured by this bandit, and would most likely suffer his wrath. How were they to know that this bandit really wanted to have a laugh and pretend to be a newly wed? They were surprised and all thanked and expressed gratitude to Yang Guo. The nanny was much more vocal and said, "Da Wang and his wife would stay together for hundred of years until both of you are old with white hair. You are going to have many little 'Da Wangs'." This made Yang Guo laugh; Lu Wushuang was embarrassed and angry with this.

Yang Guo and Lu Wushuang found an inn and called for some rice and other dishes. They were about to eat when they saw someone enter and after seeing the two of them,

immediately turned around and walked away. Yang Guo knew something was wrong and went over to the entrance and saw two people standing in a pavilion. It was the two Taoists who fought with Lu Wushuang at Wolf Valley, Shen Zhifan and Ji Qingxu. The two of them took out their long swords and darted forward.

Yang Guo thought, "Why are you two trying to make trouble for me? Are you looking for pain?"

The two approached but slanted their body and brushed past him; they hurried into the hall and headed for Lu Wushuang. At this time, the ringing of a bell was suddenly heard, 'ding ling' 'ding ling'.

By the time the ringing sounds were in their ears, the source had arrived. The two Taoists' faces changed and they glanced at each other. They darted to the first room of the western wing and closed the door, and didn't come out again.

Yang Guo thought, "Rotten Taoists, you've probably tasted Li Mochou's pain before, that's why you're acting like this."

Lu Wushuang quietly said, "My master is near, Sha Dan, what should we do?"

Yang Guo said, "What shall we do? Let's run!" As soon as he stretched out his hand to help her up, the ringing sound had arrived at the entrance of the inn. They heard Li Mochou say, "Guard the roof."

They then heard the waiter say, "Angelic priestess, old senior's room, ai ya, I ..." A thudding sound was heard as he landed on the floor, there wasn't another sound. He didn't know that Li Mochou hated people who mentioned the word 'old'. What about when someone called her 'old senior'? The fly whisk was waved and robbed the old waiter of his life. She asked another waiter, "There's a lame girl here, where is

she?" That waiter was already scared out of his wits, he couldn't reply and just said, "I...I..." Li Mochou kicked him away with her left foot; her right foot kicked open the door of the first room of the western wing. She went in and took a look; it was where the Taoists Shen and Ji were staying.

Yang Guo thought, "It's best if we leave by the backdoor, although Hong Lingbo will see us, it won't be too much trouble." He quietly said, "Wifey, escape with me."

Lu Wushuang looked at him and got up, thinking that if she was able to escape this time then heaven must be looking out for her. As soon as the two got up, a guest from the table in the eastern corner came up to them and quietly said, "I'll lure the enemy away, quickly think of a way to escape." That person sat in an out of sight place, Lu Wushuang and Yang Guo couldn't see his face. When the person was speaking his face was turned away, as soon as they finished speaking, he immediately left through the main door. They could only see the person's back. That person wasn't tall; he wore a flowing blue green gown. Yang Guo and Lu Wushuang looked at each other and then heard the bell ringing, going towards the north.

Hong Lingbo called out; "Master, someone's escaping." A yellow blur came out of the room; Li Mochou dashed out of the inn and chased after the escapee.

Lu Wushuang quickly said, "Quickly run!"

Yang Guo thought, "Li Mochou's lightness kung fu is extremely quick, she will be able to catch up with that person in just a second, and then she will return here. I won't be able to go that fast with Miss Lu on my back; we won't be able to run away." An idea dawned on him; he dashed into the first room of the western wing. He saw the Taoists Shen and Ji sitting by the bed, their faces' were still carrying the shocked look from before. There was no time to delay, Yang Guo didn't

allow for the two to get up and ask questions as he dashed forward and moved his finger, sealing the two's pressure points, keeping them still. He called out, "Wifey, enter." Lu Wushuang entered the room. Yang Guo closed the doors and said, "Quickly take off your clothes!"

Lu Wushuang's face blushed and hissed, "Sha Dan, what are you saying now?"

Yang Guo said, "It's up to you whether you want to take off your clothes or not, I'm going to." He took off his outer garment and put on Shen Zhifan's Taoist gown and hat.

Lu Wushuang then understood, and said, "Fine, we'll pretend to be Taoists to fool my master." She stretched out her hand and undid her buttons. Her face turned red and she kicked Ji Qingxu. She said, "Close your eyes you filthy Taoist!" The two Taoists could not move but still had control of their five senses. They closed their eyes immediately; how would they dare to look at her?

Lu Wushuang said, "Sha Dan, turn around, don't watch me change."

Yang Guo laughed and said, "What are you worried about, I helped you fix your ribs back into place, haven't I already seen you?" As soon as he said this he felt that he was impolite and had offended her, he couldn't stop himself from feeling a bit embarrassed. All Yang Guo had to do was to lower his head and move away but he was in a trance, a slap came and he was heavily struck on the left cheek. Lu Wushuang thought that she could never have hit him in a million years, still she didn't hold back. She felt apologetic; she laughed and said, "Sha Dan, does it hurt? Who told you to speak such crap?"

Yang Guo touched his cheek and laughed, he turned around.

Lu Wushuang changed into the Taoist gown and laughed, "Take a look! Don't I look like a young Taoist?"

Yang Guo said, "I can't see so I don't know."

Lu Wushuang said, "Sha Dan, turn around."

Yang Guo turned around and saw her Taoist gown was flowing, it showed off her figure even better, he was about to say something when Lu Wushuang gave a grunt and pointed to the bed, and saw a Taoist's head sticking out of the covers, it was the Taoist whose fingers had been cut off by her, Pi Quanxuan. All along he had been lying on the bed resting, when he saw Lu Wushuang enter, he immediately hid his head under the covers. The two of them were preoccupied with changing and didn't notice him.

Lu Wushuang said, "He...he..." She wanted to say 'he saw me changing' but couldn't say the words. At this time, the donkey's bell was heard. Yang Guo listened and knew that Li Mochou had taken the donkey back. When the guest in blue green rode the donkey, the bell's ringing was scattered, when Li Mochou rode her donkey, though she rode it fast the bell's ringing was ordered. An idea came; he picked up Pi Quanxuan and sealed his pressure point at the same time. He opened the compartment underneath the bed and placed him in there. It's cold in the north, on winter nights the bed will be warmed by a fire underneath it, it was now summer, there was no need to light a fire but there was ash and coal beneath, Pi Quanxuan's face was covered with grey ash. The ringing sound of the bell stopped, Li Mochou had come back to the inn.

Yang Guo said to Lu Wushuang, "Sleep in the bed."

Lu Wushuang's brows raised and said, "A smelly Taoist has slept there, its dirty, how can I sleep in it?"

Yang Guo said, "It's up to you!" As he said this he stuck Shen Zhifan underneath the bed as well and unsealed Ji Qingxu's pressure point at the same time. Though Lu Wushuang felt that the bed and covers were dirty, she thought about how venomous her Master was so she got into the bed, facing the wall. As soon as she pretended to sleep, Li Mochou kicked open the door and came to search the room for a second time. Yang Guo took a tea cup and lowered his head, drinking tea, his left hand covering the fatal pressure point on Ji Qingxu's back. Li Mochou saw that there were still three Taoists, Ji Qingxu's face was grey and was shaking; Li Mochou laughed and searched the second room.

When she searched the room for the first time, she had studied the faces of the three Taoists carefully afraid that Lu Wushuang had disguised herself as one of them; she didn't take a closer look the second time.

That night Li Mochou and her disciple searched the town's inns, disturbing everyone. Yang Guo and Lu Wushuang lay on the bed with their heads together; he smelt her womanly scent and was happy. Lu Wushuang had many thoughts, she felt that Yang Guo was an extremely strange person, if one said he was a 'Sha Dan', he was extremely clever, if one said he was intelligent, he would act mad and crazy. She lay on the bed not daring to move, thinking that Sha Dan would definitely try to hug her, what would she do then? A while passed but there was no movement from Yang Guo, she was actually disappointed. She smelt the manly scent of Yang Guo and was captivated by it; time passed as she slowly fell asleep.

When Yang Guo woke up the sky was bright, he saw Ji Qingxu in deep sleep across the table; Lu Wushuang was quiet, her cheeks were rosy, her red lips slightly apart, he couldn't stop himself from being moved and thought, "If I lightly kiss her, she won't know."

He's a young man who is experiencing his first awakenings of desire (qing dou chu kai). He had never been close to a girl before and right now he was at his most emotional state. He thought about the time when he was fixing her ribs and saw her naked breasts, it was even harder for him to resist. Yang Guo moved his head forward, wanting to kiss her on the lips. Before the lips met he smelt a fragrant scent, his heart stirred, his blood rushed, then her brows crinkled; she seemed to still feel the pain of her broken ribs in her dreams. When Yang Guo saw her face like this he immediately remembered Xiao Longnu and then remembered the oath he swore, "I will only have Gu Gu in my heart in my lifetime, if my heart changes, there will be no need for Gu Gu to kill me, when I see her face I will kill myself." He broke out in a cold sweat and two slapping sounds were heard, he had slapped himself heavily across his cheeks and leapt off the bed.

This woke up Lu Wushuang; she opened her eyes and asked, "Sha Dan, what are you doing?"

Yang Guo was feeling embarrassed and guilty, he mumbled, "Nothing, it's just a mosquito biting my face."

Lu Wushuang remembered how she slept with him last night, her face suddenly turned red, she lowered her head and gently said, "Sha Dan, Sha Dan!" Her voice carried a soft and caring tone. After a while she raised her head and asked, "Sha Dan, how come you know the Ancient Tomb's "Beauty Fist Technique"?"

Yang Guo said, "When I dream at night many beautiful women and minks came and taught me a stance, that's how I know."

Lu Wushuang gave a 'humph' sound; she knew that he wouldn't answer anything about it if she asked again. Just as she was about to change the subject, she suddenly heard the ringing sound of Li Mochou's donkey. They headed in a

northwest direction and then returned. Li Mochou thought about how the 'Five Poison Codex' was in Lu Wushuang's hands; another day without the book meant another day of danger, she didn't dare to waste any time. Before the sky became bright she rode her donkey and searched everywhere nearby.

Yang Guo said, "When she can't find us she will leave. It's a pity that you're hurt and can't move much, otherwise we would steal a pair of horses and gallop for one day and one night, how would she be able to catch up then?"

Lu Wushuang angrily said, "You're not hurt, why don't you go and steal a horse and gallop for a day and night?"

Yang Guo thought, "This girl takes everything to heart, I just said something without thinking and she got angry." But he wanted to see her angry expression and wanted to anger her further and said, "If it weren't for you begging me to take you to Jiangnan, I would have long gone."

Lu Wushuang was furious and said, "Just go, go! Sha Dan, just looking at you makes me angry, just go and die by yourself."

Yang Guo laughed and said, "Huh, I'll miss you if you die." He was afraid that Lu Wushuang was going to get angry for real and aggravate her injury so he laughed and exited the room. He found an ink block and returned to the room. He placed the ink block in a basin of water and rubbed it about, and then suddenly he touched Lu Wushuang's face. Lu Wushuang wasn't prepared for this hand coming towards her and touching her face, she scolded, "Rotten Sha Dan, bastard Sha Dan." She then saw him take out a pile of ash from underneath the bed, he smeared the ash and brushed the water on his face, his face was dirty and unsightly, as if his face was full of pimples and boils.

She then understood, "Although I've changed into Taoist clothes my face hasn't changed, if my master catches up with me, how could she not recognize me?" She then smeared the ink water over her face. Girls naturally love to make themselves as beautiful as possible, although she was smearing ink water, she applied it as if she was applying make up.

The two finished with their disguises. Yang Guo stretched out his leg underneath the bed and unsealed the two Taoist's pressure points. Lu Wushuang saw that Yang Guo didn't even take a look and after some kicks the two Taoists made a relieved grunt. She was secretly in awe of him and thought, "That Sha Dan's kung fu is ten times better than mine." But she didn't show any sign of this and instead kept on scolding him, as if she thought nothing of him. Yang Guo went to the market to look for a cart but the market was too small, there were no carts for rent, he could only buy two horses. That day, Lu Wushuang's injury had eased; both of them rode on the horses and slowly went southeast.

They rode for a few hours; Yang Guo was afraid that she was tired so he helped her down off the horse and sat on a rock and rested. He remembered how he almost treated Lu Wushuang with disrespect; although he felt that treating Lu Wushuang with disrespect wasn't anything serious, he would have done something disrespectful to his Gu Gu. He was a bastard. He was insulting and cursing himself when Lu Wushuang suddenly asked, "Sha Dan, why aren't you talking to me."

Yang Guo smiled and didn't reply. He suddenly thought of something and asked, "Ai ya, crap, I'm so dumb."

Lu Wushuang said, "You are dumb!"

Yang Guo said, "When we disguised ourselves, the three Taoists saw us. If they tell your master, won't that be a

disaster?”

Lu Wushuang pursed her lips and smiled, then said, “Those three Taoists rode past us long ago and my master is still behind us. What’s wrong with you Sha Dan, what were you in a daze about, you didn’t even see them ride past us.”

Yang Guo gave an ‘ah’ sound and laughed. Lu Wushuang felt that his laugh had a hidden meaning behind it, she remembered the words she just said, “What’s wrong with you Sha Dan, what were you in a daze about”, she couldn’t stop her face from turning red. At this time, they suddenly heard the neigh of a horse.

Lu Wushuang turned around and saw two beggars approaching from around the corner. Yang Guo took a look and saw a head peep out and withdraw back behind the edge of the mountain, it was Shen Zhifan and Ji Qingxu. He thought, “So the three Taoists told the Beggar Clan that we’ve dressed up as Taoists.”

He held up his hand and said, “Beggar masters, if you want to ask for food or money, old Taoist here has already given as much as he could today, you’ll have to leave empty handed.”

One of the beggars had a voice like an overwhelming bell, he said, “Even if you shaved your head and disguised yourselves as a monk or a nun, you won’t be able to get past my eyes and ears. Don’t play dumb anymore, just get it over with and come with us to see the elder and sort this matter out.”

Yang Guo thought, “Those two old beggars have eight pockets on their back, I’m afraid that they might be very skilled.”

The two beggars were eight band members, they saw that the two of them were at most twenty years old yet they

managed to defeat four band four members and three band five members. They thought that there must something strange going on here.

Both sides were suspicious of each other. In the northwest the ringing of a gold bell could be heard, 'ding ling' 'ding ling', it was light and swift, it was pleasant to the ear.

Lu Wushuang thought, "Crap... crap. Although I have disguised my face, I had to bump into those two old beggars at this time, if they've uncovered my identity, how will I be able to escape from my master? Oh crap, I'm really out of luck this time. There had to be someone with nothing better to do with themselves once they've been fed, they just had to come and find me."

In a short while, the bell's ringing became closer. Yang Guo thought, "I won't be able to beat her, the only thing I can do is to quickly find a path to escape on." He said, "You two aren't begging for alms, and you won't come close, just let us pass." As he said this he took large steps forward. The two beggars saw that his steps weren't solid; it seems that he didn't know any martial arts; each one stretched out their arm and grabbed him.

Yang Guo chopped out his right hand and clashed with the two palms, the three palms pulled back and each one took three steps back. The two eight band Beggar Clan members have practiced martial arts for tens of years, their internal energy was profound, in the world of Jianghu there were few who could match them. In terms of kung fu foundation they were ahead of Yang Guo but when it comes to the mastery of exquisite stances, they weren't a match for him. Yang Guo borrowed strength to use strength and dispersed the two's palms but if he wanted to dash pass them, it would be impossible. The three of them were secretly startled. At this time Li Mochou and her disciple had arrived at the scene.

Hong Lingbo called out, "Hey, Beggar, Taoist, have you seen a lame girl pass by here?"

The two beggars had a high status in the world of Wulin, when they heard Hong Lingbo question them like this they became angry but the Beggar Clan had strict rules, the members mustn't get into feuds with others as they pleased so the two just replied, "No!"

Li Mochou's eyes were sharp and saw the back of Lu Wushuang, she was suspicious and thought, "I think I've seen those two before?" She saw the four facing each other, their weapons braced as if they were about to fight, she thought she should stand aside and see what happens.

Yang Guo glanced over and saw that she had a wry smile on her face, standing by watching the battle, he had a thought, "I've got it, and if I do this I'll erase her suspicions." He turned around and went over to Hong Lingbo to ask her something, he disguised his voice and said, "Greetings Taoist friend." Hong Lingbo returned the greeting.

He said, "This Taoist was just passing by when these two evil beggars started to cause trouble, wanting to fight me. This Taoist has not got weapon, I hope you will lend me a weapon in respect of Lao Jun." As he said this he made another bow.

Hong Lingbo saw that his face was black and ugly, but he was respectful and modest, he referred to the Taoist's Tai Shang Lao Jun. It didn't seem right to reject his request so she held out her sword and glanced at her master. She saw that she was nodding her head and so handed the sword to him. Yang Guo bowed as he received the long sword, the tip pointing to the ground, he said, "If this Taoist can't fight off the enemy, I hope that Taoist friend here will look upon the fact that we are people of religion and will assist me."

Hong Lingbo raised her eyebrows and gave a 'humph' sound without replying.

Yang Guo turned around and loudly said to Lu Wushuang, "Apprentice brother, sit by the side and watch and don't move, I'm going to teach the Beggar Clan beggars the skills of our Quanzhen sect."

Li Mochou shivered, "So the two Taoists are from the Quanzhen sect. But Quanzhen sect and the Beggar Clan have always been good friends, why are they arguing?"

Yang Guo was afraid that the two beggars would speak and reveal who Lu Wushuang was so he raised his sword and dashed forward, calling out, "Come, come, come, I'll fight two by myself."

But Lu Wushuang was concerned, "Sha Dan doesn't know that my master has fought Quanzhen sect on many occasions, how would she not be able to recognize the stances of the Quanzhen sect? There are many Taoist sects in the world, Zhengyi, Dadao, Taiyi, they are all good choices for our cover why the hell did he pick Quanzhen?"

The two beggars heard him say 'From the Quanzhen sect' and were alarmed, the both called out, "Are you really from Quanzhen sect? You and..."

Yang Guo didn't allow them to mention Lu Wushuang and thrust his sword forward, separately attacking the stomachs of the two; it was Quanzhen's "Di Chuan" sword skills. The two beggar's status was high, they could gang up and fight a young boy like him but Yang Guo's stance came out extremely quick. They had to attack together with their sticks. As the metal rods were raised, Yang Guo's sword darted through the gap and aimed for their chests. The two beggars could never have predicted that his sword skills were extremely quick; they quickly retreated. Yang Guo

didn't hold back, he kept on applying the pressure, in a flash he had unleashed eighteen swords, every stance had two intentions, when the sword comes out it was one stance, but within it was artifice, the sword stance separated into two. This was Quanzhen's "One Sword into Three Distinctions" (yi jian hua san qing) technique; every stance can be made into three. Every stance that Yang Guo threw out, the beggars moved back three steps, after the eighteen stances had been unleashed, the beggars had not even attacked back once, and they had retreated back a total of fifty-four steps. The kung fu of the "Jade Heart Manual" was designed to counter Quanzhen's kung fu. Before Yang Guo practiced the "Jade Heart Manual" he practiced the kung fu of the Quanzhen sect. But because he had not practiced enough and it wasn't refined enough, he wasn't able to do "One Sword into Three Distinctions", but he was good enough to turn it into two distinctions.

Li Mochou saw that the young Taoist's sword skills were refined, she couldn't help being shocked and thought, "No wonder Quanzhen's name is so famous, there are able people from the sect, in ten years time how will I be able to beat him? It looks the mantel of the Quanzhen sect is going to fall into his hands in the future."

If she fought with Yang Guo, she would know that although the stances were real on the outside, underneath it was the Ancient Tomb's kung fu, but from its appearance, it was hard to distinguish between the two. Yang Guo had learned the Quanzhen song from Zhao Zhijing, and practiced it afterwards, and so his Quanzhen kung fu wasn't completely a fake. Lu Wushuang and Hong Lingbo looked on, dazzled.

Yang Guo thought, "If I slow down and allow the two beggars to talk, we'll be finished." Once the eighteen stances had passed, the long sword quickly turned around and attacked the two beggars backs, another set of two distinctions. The

two beggars quickly turned around to attack. Yang Guo didn't allow the metal rods and the sword to collide, he quickly darted behind the two's backs. The beggars turned around, Yang Guo darted behind the beggars again. He knew that if it came to a real kung fu contest, he would not be able to handle one beggar let alone two; he utilized his lightness kung fu and circled around the two beggars. In the Quanzhen sect, as soon as one has refined their kung fu to a high level, they will practice lightness kung fu so later on they will be able to use it when practicing the "Big Dipper Formation". Although Yang Guo is now using the steps of Quanzhen's kung fu, but his breathing and circulation are from the formulae of the "Jade Heart Manual". The Ancient Tomb's lightness kung fu was second to none in the world, as soon as he used it, the two skilled Beggar Clan fighters were not able to catch up, they saw him moving like lightning, a white blur, the sword piercing forwards. If he wanted to kill them, even if twenty beggars were here he would be able to kill them. The two beggars quickly turned around and waved their rods in defense, right now they weren't able to defend against the incoming stances; they used all their strength in defense and hoped that heaven was on their side. They ran around like this for around ten loops, the two beggars were dizzy and dazed, their feet rapid, they felt that they were about to faint.

Li Mochou chuckled and said, "Hey, my Beggar Clan friends, I'll teach you a method, stand back to back so you won't have to keep on turning around." With this pointer, the two beggars were filled with joy, they were about to follow this method when Yang Guo thought, "Crap! If this happen I'm going to lose." He stopped circling them, two stances in one, as the sword was thrust forwards aiming for their backs. The two beggars heard the wind sound from the sword; they weren't able to use their rods to block it so advanced forward. As soon as they took a step the stance arrived, they

were shocked and quickly hurried out of the way. How could they have predicted that Yang Guo's sword was like a shadow, no matter how fast they ran away, the sword remained behind their backs? The two's steps slowed, their backs were pierced by the sword. The two beggars knew that Yang Guo didn't want to kill them; otherwise all he had to do was just add an ounce more strength. The sword would have moved an inch further; wouldn't the sword have gone through their chests? But they still didn't dare to slow their steps. The three used their energy and in a flash they had moved over two miles, leaving Li Mochou and the others behind. Yang Guo suddenly sped up and dashed in front of the two. He laughed and said, "Walk slowly, be careful of tripping!" The two threw out their rods at the same time. Yang Guo stretched out his left hand and held onto one of the rods, at the same time he extended the flat side of his sword and hit the metal rod to the left. His left palm opened and held the two rods. The two beggars felt something was wrong and quickly distributed their chi. Yang Guo's internal energy wasn't a match for theirs, he didn't dare to try and match them, and swept the long sword across. If the two beggars didn't let go, their eight fingers would be slashed off immediately, they could only let go and jump back. Their faces had an expression of embarrassment. Not being able to win and using such a way to escape may have been going too far.

Yang Guo said, "My sect and your clan have always been friends, please don't believe what others say my friends. Every event has its source, the Ancient Tomb's 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' Li Mochou is over there, why aren't you questioning her?"

The two beggars did not know Li Mochou but knew that she was ruthless and vindictive, when they heard Yang Guo say this they both shivered and said at the same time, "Is this true?"

Yang Guo said, "Why should I lie? That witch chased this Taoist until I had nowhere else to run, that's why I had to fight with you two." As he said this, he raised the metal rods and politely gave them back to the beggars. He said, "It is well known what objects the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' always carries with her, haven't you two heard about this?"

One of the beggars understood and said, "Yes, she holds a fly whisk, her donkey has a golden bell. The woman is in yellow isn't she?"

Yang Guo smiled and said, "Correct, correct. The girl who used the silver saber to hurt your clan member is her disciple." He then made his voice slightly deeper and said, "I'm afraid that it's ominous, it ominous."

The beggar with the voice like an overwhelming bell was impatient and asked, "What are you afraid of?"

Yang Guo said, "Ominous, ominous."

The beggar urgently asked, "What's ominous?"

Yang Guo replied, "Li Mochou is notorious in Wulin, everyone is afraid of her. Your clan may be powerful but no one is her match. Since it was a disciple of hers who injured one of your members, it would be best to leave it."

He angered that beggar; the beggar raised his metal rod and said, "Huh, I don't care if she's the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' or 'Lizard Deity', I must fight her today." As he said this he headed back towards the path. The other beggar was more cautious, thinking how they could not overcome a young man, if they incurred the wrath of the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' are they not signing their death warrants? He held the other beggar's arm and said, "There's no need to rush, let's go back and plan this first." He made a salute to Yang Guo with

one hand and said, "Please can we have the pleasure of knowing your name."

Yang Guo smiled and said, "My surname is Sa, first names Huazi. Hope we'll meet again." He made a bow and turned around hurrying back to the others.

The two beggars mumbled, "Sa Huazi, Sa Huazi? I have never heard this name; this person's skills are excellent at such a young age..." One of the beggars suddenly leaped up and cursed, "Scoundrel, animal!"

The other beggar asked, "What?"

The beggar replied, "He's called Sa Huazi, it means kill beggars (Kill a beggar has the same Pinyin as Sa Huazi), we've been insulted without knowing it." Though the two cursed, they didn't dare to return to finish this matter with him.

Yang Guo laughed on the inside, he quickly returned and saw Lu Wushuang on top of the horse looking to the side, revealing how anxious she was. As soon as she saw Yang Guo her spirits immediately raised, she quickly met him on the horse and quietly said, "Sha Dan, leaving behind me, that was so thoughtful!"

Yang Guo smiled and offered the long sword back to Hong Lingbo with the handle end facing towards her. He bowed and said, "Thank you for the sword." Hong Lingbo stretched out her hand to receive it. Yang Guo was about to turn around when Li Mochou suddenly said, "Wait." She saw that the young Taoist was skilled; she thought that if she let him go now he would become a problem in the future. While his kung fu was still lower than hers, she would get rid of the potential problem now.

As soon as Yang Guo heard the word 'wait' he knew something was wrong, he lowered the sword a few inches into Hong Lingbo's hand and immediately took his hand away. Hong Lingbo could only take the handle of the sword and smiled, she said, "The young Taoist has some fierce skills."

Li Mochou originally wanted to anger him into attacking and kill him in one stroke with her fly whisk. But now he did not have a weapon. She was of a high status and so could not use her weapon to harm him. She flashed her fly whisk to one side and asked, "Which of the Quanzhen seven masters is your master?"

Yang Guo smiled and said, "I'm Wang Chongyang's disciple." He had no good feelings towards the Quanzhen sect; he had no respect for them. Although Qiu Chuji treated him fairly well, he was only with him for a short while, but before he left he was strictly scolded by him. He knew he didn't mean any harm but in his heart he was still angry. When he remembered Hao Datong and Zhao Zhijing, he became even angrier. In the Ancient Tomb he had practiced the important aspects of the "Nine Yin Manual" left by Wang Chongyang, so technically he could say that he was his disciple. But according to his age, he could only be the disciple of Taoists in Zhao Zhijing's and Yin Zhiping's generation. When Li Mochou saw that his skills weren't weak and asked him which one of the Quanzhen seven masters was his master, it was holding him in a lofty light. If Yang Guo replied Qiu Chuji or one of the others, Li Mochou would have believed him. But he didn't want be a generation lower than the Taoist who killed Grandma Sun, Hao Datong, so he said Wang Chongyang. Wang Chongyang was the person who founded the Quanzhen sect. In his lifetime he had only taken in seven disciples; everyone knew this in the Wulin world. When this young Taoist was born Wang Chongyang had left the world long ago.

Li Mochou thought, "This ugly freak doesn't know how high the sky is or how deep the earth is, and he doesn't know who I am, how dare he talk such nonsense in front of me." She then thought, "How could a Quanzhen Taoist use their founder for a joke? And how could they dare to say the words 'Wang Chongyang'? But if he isn't a disciple of Quanzhen, then how come each of his stances were from Quanzhen?"

Yang Guo saw that although she had a smile on her face, she was frowning and she was in deep thought. He thought about the day when he pretended to be a farmer to trick Hong Lingbo, and in the tomb they had exchanged blows. He couldn't let them find out who he really was through his words so without delay he carried on; he raised his hands in respect. He turned around and leapt onto the horse, and was about to gallop away.

Li Mochou floated over in front of his horse and said, "Come down, I have something to say to you."

Yang Guo said, "I know what you want to ask me. You want to ask me have I seen a pretty girl, who is lame in her left foot, isn't that it. And where has she taken your book?"

Li Mochou was shocked and calmly said, "Yes, you are clever. Where is the book?"

Yang Guo said, "Just now, my apprentice brother and I were resting by the side of the road, we saw that girl fighting with three beggars. One of the beggars suffered a slash from the girl but when the other two beggars joined in, she wasn't a match for them. Eventually she was captured by them."

Li Mochou was always calm no matter what, but when she thought about Lu Wushuang being caught by the beggars and her 'Five Poison Codex' falling into their hands, she couldn't stop herself from showing signs of being alarmed.

Yang Guo saw that the lie worked and continued, "One of the beggars fished out a book from the girl's pockets, she wouldn't give it to them and suffered disrespect from him."

Lu Wushuang glanced at him and thought, "Fine Sha Dan, talking rubbish about me, you think I won't do anything to you?"

Yang Guo knew that she was frightened but deliberately asked her, "Apprentice brother, doesn't it get people mad? That girl was touched all over the place by the beggars and suffered great insults didn't she?"

Lu Wushuang hung her head down and gave a grunt. As he said this, there were the sounds of horse hoofs around the hill, a crowd of horses and people came up. It was a group of Mongolian soldiers. Once the Jin were overthrown, everything north of the Mie River was under the control of the Mongolians. Li Mochou didn't care about the soldiers, but she was in a rush to find out the whereabouts of Lu Wushuang. She didn't want anything to delay her so she stood aside feeling the ground shaking as over a hundred Mongolian soldiers escorting an official passed by. The Mongolian official wore a bright garment, a bow hung from his waist, his horse riding technique was excellent and he exuded an air of calmness as he rode past. Once the soldiers passed, Li Mochou wiped the dust away from her body using her fly whisk. Every time the fly whisk waved, Lu Wushuang's heart missed a beat, she knew if the fly whisk was waved at her and not the dust, her head would have split open immediately.

After she finished cleaning herself up she asked, "And then?"

Yang Guo said, "The beggars took the girl and headed north. This young Taoist couldn't just stand by and tried to interfere, and two of the beggars stayed behind to fight with me."

Li Mochou nodded her head and smiled, she said, “Good, thank you. My name is Li Mochou, people in Jianghu call me the ‘Scarlet Serpent Deity’, and some call me the ‘Serpent Demon’. Have you heard my name before?”

Yang Guo shook his head and said, “I have never heard of you. Miss, with your beauty you are like a deity, how can you be a demon?”

Li Mochou was thirty, but she had profound internal strength, her skin was soft and tender, her face had no wrinkles and one could mistake her for a twenty year old. She had always regarded herself as beautiful and when she heard him praising her like that she was pleased, she fluttered her fly whisk and said, “You joked with me. Saying that you are the disciple of Wang Chongyang, I should make you suffer and then kill you. Since you’ve said this, I’m going to teach you a lesson with my fly whisk.”

Yang Guo shook his head and said, “That won’t do, that won’t do, this young Taoist cannot fight with someone in a lower generation than he is.”

Li Mochou said, “You are about to die and you still joke. How am I in a lower generation than you?”

Yang Guo said, “My master is elder Chongyang, he is in the same generation as your ancestor; how am I not in an older generation than you? You are just a pretty young girl; an old man can’t bully you.”

Li Mochou gave a wry smile and said to Hong Lingbo “Let him borrow the sword again.”

Yang Guo waved his hand and said, “That won’t do, that won’t do, I...” Before he finished his words Hong Lingbo pulled out the sword from its sheath, a ‘ting’ sound was heard; her hand holding only the handle, the blade remained

in the sheath. She was startled but then understood, when Yang Guo returned the sword he had done something to it; he broke the sword but kept the handle intact. As soon as someone applied some force to the sword, it immediately broke. Li Mochou's face changed colour.

Yang Guo said, "Originally I didn't want to fight pretty girls who are beneath me, but since you are forcing me to fight, then so be it! I'll face three stances of your fly whisk empty handed. Let's make it clear first, as long as you can receive my three stances then I'll let you go, but once the three stances are over, you can't trouble me anymore." In this present situation he knew that he must use force otherwise he won't be able to get out of this situation. But if they really fight, he won't be a match for her. So he acted like a senior and made her promise that she will only use three stances and not more. He was not her match anyway so it didn't matter if he had a weapon or not; hopefully she would not use her most lethal fly whisk stances.

How could Li Mochou not understand his intentions, she thought, "You think you can receive three of my stances?" She said, "Fine, senior, let junior experience your skills."

Yang Guo said, "You're too kind" but suddenly he saw a yellow blur; there were traces of the fly whisk everywhere. This stance of Li Mochou's is called "No Holes that can't be Penetrated" (wu kong bu ru), attacking the enemy's bones all over their body. Although this is one stance, the threads were all over the place, so in one stance it included tens of stances, attacking all the body's main pressure points. She had seen him fight with the beggars and saw that his sword skills were refined, he wasn't a weak opponent. Hurting him in three stances was not going to be easy so she used the techniques that she was most proud of, "Three Without Three Without Hands" (san wu san bu shou). She had invented these three stances; even Xiao Longnu had never seen these

stances before. When Yang Guo saw this he jumped back in shock. There was actually no defense to this stance. Moving to the left and right would result in one's pressure points to be sealed; moving forward would result in the pressure points on the back being harmed. Only fighters who were much more skilful than she was could force her back. Attacking her front ruthlessly would force her to use her fly whisk to defend. Yang Guo did not have this ability. In this urgent situation he flipped around, his head below his legs and used the skill that Ouyang Feng taught him, "Reversal of the Veins". His pressure points were all closed; he felt all his pressure points ache a little and then nothing more. He quickly flipped over and gave out a flying kick. Li Mochou had seen that she had hit many of his pressure points but he still had the ability to counter attack. She was shocked and followed with a stance of "Penetrate Everywhere" (wu suo bu zhi). This stance attacked all the pressure points on his sides. Yang Guo's head was on the ground, he stretched out his left hand to seal her right knee's 'Central' pressure point. Li Mochou was even more shocked and leapt away. The "Three Without Three Without Hand" technique's third stance "Stop At Nothing" was immediately used.

This stance does not aim to seal pressure points; instead it attacked the eyes, throat, stomach, the groin and all the places that are soft and delicate. That's why it's called "Stop at Nothing", it was ruthless and showed no respect towards the opponent. When she refined this skill she did not know that there were people who knew how to fight upside down. When she rushed out in this stance, she used it as she normally would, but there was no way the attack hit the eyes, it struck the leg, where it attacked the throat it struck the lower thigh, where it attacked the stomach it struck the upper thigh, where it attacked the groin it struck the chest, it aimed for the soft points but struck the hard and the stance was not effective at all.

This shocked Li Mochou to the extreme. She had seen many battles in her life, she had met those who were better fighters than her so she knew what the enemy would do, how they attacked, defended, dodged, she knew it all; but she couldn't have guessed this young Taoist had such unimaginable kung fu. As she stood there in a daze, Yang Guo opened his mouth and bit down on the fly whisk; he flipped his body and stood up. Li Mochou's hand shook; her fly whisk was taken away.

At the second Mount Hua competition, Ouyang Feng reversed his veins and bit down on Huang Yaoshi's finger. When one reverses their veins, chi is distributed through their lips, the mouth will open and close, the intent to bite someone is automatically created. In the body, nothing can compare with the strength of teeth biting down; the teeth can shatter and tear things that hands can't. Because of this, although Yang Guo's internal strength was weaker than Li Mochou's, once his teeth bit down on the fly whisk; he was able to pull it from her hands.

This move shocked Lu Wushuang and Hong Lingbo, both of them called out in surprise at the same time. Li Mochou was also shocked but she didn't show any fear, her palms lightly came out, she was using her "Diving Serpent Palm" and jumping forward to snatch back her fly whisk. She was about to hit out with her palms when she suddenly called out, "What! It's you! Where's your master?"

Yang Guo's face had been covered in dirt but after a series of quick flips, some of the dirt was brushed off, revealing half of his face. At the same time Hong Lingbo recognized Lu Wushuang and called out, "Master, it's apprentice sister." Before, Lu Wushuang had dared not to face Li Mochou and Hong Lingbo. When Yang Guo and Li Mochou were fighting, she was concentrating on watching the fight and forgot about hiding her face from Hong Lingbo.

Yang Guo's left foot touched the ground lightly and flew onto Li Mochou's donkey, at the same time his left hand flicked out, a 'Jade Bee Needle' was shot at the head of Hong Lingbo's donkey. Li Mochou was furious and flew over to Yang Guo who flew away from the saddle and flipped the fly whisk around, a 'pu' sound was heard as he struck the donkey on the head and called out, "Wifey, quickly take your husband away." He leapt on the back of the horse and he waved the fly whisk madly behind him. Lu Wushuang immediately spurred the horse on. Once Li Mochou utilized her lightness kung fu, she could catch up to four legged animals that were within half li or so. But after being shocked by Yang Guo's strange stances she didn't dare to chase too closely, she just used her trapping hand kung fu to snatch back her fly whisk. On her fourth stance three of the fingers on her left hand managed to grab hold of the threads of the fly whisk; she turned her hand and pulled. Yang Guo couldn't hold on and the fly whisk flew out of his hand.

Hong Lingbo's donkey had been struck with the 'Jade Bee Needle', it suddenly went mad, and it rushed up to Li Mochou and started to bite.

Li Mochou shouted, "Lingbo, what are you doing." Hong Lingbo said, "The donkey is resisting." She pulled the reigns with all her strength causing the donkey to have a mouthful of blood. Suddenly the donkey's legs became soft and it fell over, Hong Lingbo leapt up and called out, "Master, let's chase after them!" But by then Yang Guo and Lu Wushuang were half a li away, they weren't able to catch up.

Lu Wushuang and Yang Guo rode hurriedly for a while. She turned around and didn't see her master chasing after them and said, "Sha Dan, my chest really hurts, I can't stand it anymore!"

Yang Guo leapt off the horse and placed his ear against the ground, there weren't any sound of footsteps behind and he said, "There's no need to be afraid, let's go slowly." The two then carried on normally. Lu Wushuang sighed and said, "Sha Dan, how did you manage to take my Master's fly whisk?"

Yang Guo said, "I threw out some words of praise which pleased her and so she gave the fly whisk to me. Old man didn't feel right taking the young girl's things so I gave it back to her."

Lu Wushuang said, "Huh, why was she pleased, she thought you were handsome?" As she said this she blushed.

Yang Guo laughed and said, "She saw that I was an interesting fool, that's why."

Lu Wushuang said, "Crap! What's so interesting about you?"

The two traveled slowly for a while but they were afraid that Li Mochou would catch up so they rode fast. They did this slowing down and speeding up until it was dusk.

Yang Guo said, "Wifey, if you want to save your little life, you'll have to endure the pain in your chest and ride throughout the night."

Lu Wushuang said, "If you talk crap again, just see if I continue to pay attention to you."

Yang Guo stuck out his tongue and said, "It's a pity that our horse is tired, another night of riding and we could escape."

It was now getting dark but suddenly, the sound of horses could be heard ahead, Yang Guo was delighted and said, "Let's change horses."

The two hurried on for about a mile and saw over a hundred horses outside a village. It was the group of Mongolian

soldiers that they had seen earlier. Yang Guo said, "Wait here, I'll go and take a look." He leapt down from the horse and headed towards the village. He saw a light coming from the window of a large house. Yang Guo darted forward and looked inside; he saw a Mongolian official sitting in the room with his back facing the window.

Yang Guo's mind suddenly lit up, "If we're going to change horses why not change people." He waited for a while and saw the Mongolian official stand up, walking up and down across the room. That man was about thirty years old; it was the official in bright clothing he had seen earlier in the day. He had an air about him; it appeared that his post wasn't low. Yang Guo waited until he turned his back and quietly opened the window and slipped in. The official heard a wind sound behind him, he took a step forward and raised his left hand for protection and turned around, and his ten fingers like an eagle's claws came out ferociously. It was the lethal technique of the "Vigorous Eagle Claw Stance". Yang Guo was slightly surprised by this, he didn't know that a Mongolian official would know some kung fu; he slanted his body and dodged past his hands. The official clawed out many times but each time they were calmly dodged. That official had been under the tutelage of the Eagle Claw sect when he was younger, his kung fu was quite good, but after exchanging many stances with Yang Guo, he had no way of using his moves. Yang Guo saw that his hands were coming in ferociously once again, he suddenly leapt up, his left hand grabbed the man's left shoulder, his right hand grabbed the man's right, he circulated his chi through his arms and shouted, "Sit down!" The official's knees became weak and he sat down on the floor. His chest felt like he was being smothered, it seemed like a surge of blood was rushing up to his head. Yang Guo stretched out his hand and rubbed the pressure points on his chest. The official immediately felt his chest loosen, a breath of air was released and he slowly got

up. He stared at Yang Guo, startled. After a few minutes he asked, "Who are you? Why are you here?" Those two phrases in Han were spoken quite clearly.

Yang Guo laughed and asked him some questions instead, "What is your name? What post do you hold?" The official's eyes lit up in anger, he was about to jump out at him again. Yang Guo ignored him and sat down on the seat that the official had previously sat on. The official's arms came out waving up and down, attacking ferociously; Yang Guo just waved out his hands without trying and didn't use any strength to neutralize his attacks. He said, "Hey, you've got a wound on your shoulder, its better if you don't use any energy."

The official was startled and said, "What wound?" His left hand rubbed his right shoulder, there was a slight pain there, he quickly stretched out his right hand and checked his left shoulder, and there was an identical pain. He had not moved his shoulders so didn't notice the wounds; when he used his fingers to touch his shoulder, there was a small area that ached to the bone. The official was shocked, he quickly took off his garment and looked over his shoulder; he saw a red dot on his left shoulder and there was a similar dot on his right. He understood, just know when Yang Guo held his shoulders, he had a concealed weapon in his hands and now had fallen into his scheme. He was startled and shocked, he shouted, "What weapon did you use? Does it have poison or not?"

Yang Guo gave a wry smile and said, "You've learned martial arts, how come you don't know the rules? Large concealed weapons have no poison, small ones of course have." The official believed him but hoped that he made it up to scare him. His face's expression seems to be convinced but also seemed to be suspicious.

Yang Guo smiled and said, "Your shoulder has fallen victim to my divine needle, its poison deepens an inch every day, by the sixth day the poison will have reached the heart, then you'll be dead."

The official wanted him to cure the poison yet he didn't dare ask. In anger he shouted, "Since it has ended up like this then this Master is going to take you with me." He threw himself forward again. Yang Guo slipped past him.

He took out two 'Jade Bee Needles' and waited until his claws came out again, the hands came out, he sent the needles into his palms. The official felt a pain in his palms and stopped, he raised his hands to take a look and saw a fine needle in his palms. He immediately felt his palms go numb; he was shocked and didn't dare to attack again. Another half hour passed before he said, "Fine, I admit defeat!"

Yang Guo laughed out loud and asked, "What's your name?"

The official replied, "My name is Yelu Jin, can I have the honour of knowing the hero's name?"

Yang Guo replied, "My name is Yang Guo. What post do you hold within the Mongolian government?"

Yelu Jin told him everything. He was the Mongolians Prime Minister Yelu Chucai's son. Yelu Chucai aided Genghis Khan and Wo Kuo Tai (Ogedai) to take over many lands. His achievements were outstanding, that is why although Yelu Jin was of a relatively young age, he held the high position of 'Bianliang Jinglue Emissary' (Military Governor of Bianliang city), he had come south to Henan to complete a mission.

Yang Guo didn't know what kind of position this was, he just nodded his head and said, "Fine, fine."

Yelu Jin said, "I don't know what I have done to disrespect the hero, please forgive my ignorance. If the hero has an order

please say it.”

Yang Guo laughed and said, “You haven’t done anything.” He suddenly darted out of the window.

Yelu Jin was shocked and called out, “Hero Yang” and ran to the window, but there was no trace of Yang Guo. Yelu Jin was troubled, “This person comes and goes as he pleases. I’ve fallen victim to his poison needles, what should I do?” He quickly took out the needles from his palm and felt the numbness in his palms and shoulders to begin to feel unbearable. In the midst of all this the window opened, Yang Guo suddenly returned and the room had another person, it was Lu Wushuang.

Yelu Jin said, “Ah, you’ve come back.”

Yang Guo pointed to Lu Wushuang and said, “She is my Wifey, kowtow to her!”

Lu Wushuang shouted, “What did you say?” She turned her hand and gave him a slap. If Yang Guo wanted to avoid it how would she be able to hit him? For an inexplicable reason, when he was slapped and scolded by her he felt good. He didn’t move and a slapping sound was heard as his cheek was hit. Yelu Jin didn’t know that these two always argued like this. He assumed that Lu Wushuang’s kung fu was stronger than Yang Guo’s; he stared in a daze at the two.

Yang Guo rubbed his cheek and laughed at Yelu Jin. He said, “You’ve suffered the poison of my divine needles, but you won’t die straight away. All you’ve got to do is listen to my orders and then I’ll heal you.”

Yelu Jin said, “I’ve always admired heroes and good men, but I have never seen people with such abilities. Today I have finally met someone worthy of this title, it is an honour. If hero Yang doesn’t tell me to live, I could still die with my eyes

closed.” These words maintained his high status but praised the other at the same time. Yang Guo had never spoken with officials before and he didn’t know that they’ve all learned how to praise their superiors; the higher the official, the better they are at flattery without being obvious. The officials from Mongolia were rough and coarse people but after they entered the central plains, they learned the ways of the officials of China. After some words of praise, Yang Guo was pleased, he raised his finger and said, “Well, I didn’t guess that you are a man of honour as well. Come, I’ll immediately cure your poison.” He then used a sucking metal stone to remove the needles from his shoulder and then applied the antidote to the wounds.

Lu Wushuang had never seen the ‘Jade Bee Needles’ before; she saw that the needles were as fine as hair and it looked as though if one placed the needles on water, they will float. She thought, “A gust of wind can blow that away, how can you use it as a concealed weapon?” She was even more in awe of Yang Guo but the words from her mouth said, “That type of evil weapon isn’t honorable, aren’t you afraid of others laughing at you?”

Yang Guo laughed and ignored her, he said to Yelu Jin, “The two of us want to rely on you, your honour and be your attendants.”

Yelu Jin was startled and quickly said, “Hero Yang jokes with me, whatever you want just tell me.”

Yang Guo said, “I’m not joking, I really want to be your attendant your honour.”

Yelu Jin thought, “So the two want work for the government and gain something for themselves.” He couldn’t stop himself from being pleased, he gave a cough and returned to a serious face and said, “Hmm, you’ve learned great martial arts, working for our king will lead to great prospects.”

Yang Guo laughed and said, "You've got it all wrong. We are being chased by an extremely powerful foe. We can't beat her and want to disguise ourselves as your attendants to evade her."

Yelu Jin was disappointed, his serious face loosened then he chuckled and said, "With your martial arts, who gives a care about enemies. If there are too many of them I'll gather my troops and catch them and let you decide on what to do."

Yang Guo said, "Even I can't beat them, there is no need for you worry about it your Honour. Quickly order your attendants to give us some clothes to change into." He said this casually but there was a stern tone within his voice.

Yelu Jin ordered his attendants to bring some clothes for them to change into. Yang Guo and Lu Wushuang went to another room to change. Lu Wushuang got a mirror and examined herself, the person in the mirror was dressed in bright clothes, their eyes sparkled; it looked like a handsome Mongolian general. She felt that this was going to be interesting. They left early next morning. Lu Wushuang and Yang Guo were in a sedan chair lifted by attendants, Yelu Jin was still on horseback, before noon they heard the faint sounds of a ringing bell, from afar it came near, and it brushed past the crowd of people.

Lu Wushuang was delighted and thought, "Comfortably sitting here in the sedan chair resting my wound is an ideal situation. Sha Dan's mad idea has its good points. I'll let them carry me to Jiangnan."

They traveled like this for two days and didn't hear the bell sounds of Li Mochou again. Li Mochou must have gone straight ahead without turning back. There were also no traces of the beggars and Taoists that were looking for Lu Wushuang. By the third day they arrived at the Colt Dragon Stockade. This was an important trafficking point, many

towns and cities flourished around here. After supper, Yelu Jin entered Yang Guo's room and asked for martial arts advice. Words of flattery were said to Yang Guo, praising him highly. Yang Guo gave one or two pointers to him. Just as Yelu Jin was about to listen intently an attendant rushed in and said, "Your honour, our master has sent a letter here."

Yelu Jin was delighted and said, "Fine, I'll come now." He was about to stand up and say goodbye to Yang Guo when he had a thought, "If I open the letter in front of him and show that I don't treat him as an outsider, he'll definitely teach me with all his efforts." He then said to the attendant, "Send the messenger in."

The attendant had a look of surprise on his face and said, "That ...that..."

Yelu Jin waved his hand and said, "Don't delay, and tell him to enter."

The attendant said, "It's the master himself."

Yelu Jin's face fell and he said, "Why are you still wasting time, quickly go" before he finished someone laughed from outside and entered, and said, "Jin'er, you couldn't have guessed that it was me."

Yelu Jin was shocked and pleased, he quickly dashed forward. He said, "Father, why are you..." That man laughed and said, "Yes! I've come here in person." That person was Yelu Jin's father, the Mongolian Prime Minister Yelu Chucai.

Yang Guo heard Yelu Jin call that man father, but didn't know how powerful that person was. He was under one person but above millions; the person with the most power in court, the Prime Minister. He saw that he wasn't very old, his face elegant, within his air of authority was an air of peace; he couldn't stop himself from respecting this person.

As soon as that person sat down on a chair, two other people entered, they greeted Yelu Jin and called him 'Big Brother'. It was one male and one female. The male was around twenty-three or four years of age, the female was about the same age as Yang Guo. Yelu Jin was pleased and said, "Brother, sister, you are here as well." He said to his father, "Father, I didn't have a clue that you had left the court."

Yelu Chucai nodded and said, "Yes, there is some important business that must be attended to; if I didn't do it myself I wouldn't be able to relax." He looked at Yang Guo and the rest of the attendants, indicating that he wants them to leave.

Yelu Jin was in a dilemma, he should tell his attendants to leave but Yang Guo was a person you couldn't mess around with, his face had an expression of being unsure of what to do. Yang Guo knew what he was thinking; he laughed and exited the room by himself. Yelu Chucai was aware of Yang Guo, when he entered by himself all the other attendants greeted and bowed to him except for one, the person did as he pleased and had a proud air, he couldn't stop himself from being wary and asked, "Who is that?"

Yelu Jin was a high official, if he said who Yang Guo was in front of his brother and sister he will have lost face, he answered ambiguously, "He is a friend that I made along the way. Father has made the trip to Henan personally, what is this about?"

Yelu Chucai sighed; his face looked troubled and slowly explained everything. When Genghis Khan died, his third son Wo Kuo Tai (Ogedai) succeeded him. Wo Kuo Tai was the Khan for about thirty years before he too died, his son Gui You (Guyuk) succeeded. Gui You lost himself in drink and died just after three years of being the Khan, his queen (Oghul Ghamish) took over the affairs of state. The queen trusted

very few, the first generals and ministers caused chaos in the court. Yelu Chucai was a senior member of the court, and was one of the people who founded the state; whenever the queen made a wrong decision he would speak up truthfully. The queen saw that he opposed her orders, and of course was angry, but because he was a powerful minister and what he said was right, the queen could not take action lightly. Yelu Chucai knew that once he offended the queen the hundred or so lives of his family would be in danger and so he thought of a plan. He said that Henan in the south was not under control; a minister was needed to go down there and sort it out and he nominated himself. The queen was delighted, thinking the further this person goes the better and she can avoid getting angry everyday. So she agreed to the order. So Yelu Chucai took his second son Yelu Qi and daughter Yelu Yan to Henan. Officially he was down here to dissipate the unrest, but unofficially he was down here to avoid a disaster.

Yang Guo went into another room and chatted and joked with Lu Wushuang but Lu Wushuang turned away and ignored him. After getting no reply, Yang Guo crossed his knees, sat down and meditated. Lu Wushuang wasn't interested. She saw that he closed his eyes and didn't move for half a day and said, "Hey, Sha Dan, why are you meditating now?" Yang Guo didn't reply. Lu Wushuang angrily said, "There is no need to rush your kung fu, are you going to chat with me?" As she was about to move him with her hand, Yang Guo suddenly leapt up and quietly said, "There's someone on the roof!"

Lu Wushuang didn't hear anything, she raised her head and look up at the roof, she said, "Are you lying again?"

Yang Gu said, "No, they're on the roof two buildings over."

Lu Wushuang didn't believe him. She laughed and quietly scolded him, "Sha Dan." She assumed that he was playing

dumb.

Yang Guo tugged her sleeve and quietly said, "Let's hide before your Master finds us."

When Lu Wushuang heard the word 'Master' and her back broke out in a cold sweat and she followed him to the window. Yang Guo lifted his head to the west, Lu Wushuang also lifted her head, and indeed, she saw someone in black on the roof of the building two rooms over. It was now the middle of the night, there was no light from the moon and stars; if one didn't carefully examine the roof, it would be hard to spot anything. She admired him secretly, "How did Sha Dan detect this?" She knew that her Master held herself very highly, when she moved at night she would still wear her apricot yellow gown, she would never wear black. She bent over to Yang Guo's ear and whispered, "It's not Master."

As soon as the words were spoken, the person in black suddenly got up and flew across the roofs arrived outside the window of the room that Yelu Chucai was in. She kicked open the window, and leapt in holding a saber, she called out, "Yelu Chucai, I'm going to take you to hell along with me." It was a girl's voice.

Yang Guo's heart shook, "That girl's movements are extremely fast, her skills are above Yelu Jin. His father is afraid that his life will be in danger."

Lu Wushuang called out, "Let's go." The two hurried to the scene and witnessed what was happening through the window. He saw that Yelu Jin was holding up a bench moving back and forth, battling with the girl in black. The girl was young but her saber techniques were vicious, the Willow Leaf Saber in her hand was extremely sharp, a series of slashes hacked off the four legs of the bench. Yelu Jin saw he that wasn't going to hold her off and called out; "Father, run away!" He then shouted, "Men, men!" The girl threw out a

kick; Yelu Jin was not prepared for it and was kicked in the waist, his body flipped as he fell onto the floor. The girl dashed forward and raised her saber above Yelu Chucai's head and slashed down.

Yang Guo thought, "Oh no!" Thinking that he should rescue that person first and then talk about it later, he held a 'Jade Bee Needle' and was about to shoot it out at the girl's wrist when he heard Yelu Chucai's daughter Yelu Yan called out, "This one mustn't have any manners!" She chopped out at the girl's face with her right palm; her left hand used "Empty Hands Entering a Hundred Blades" kung fu to take her saber. Those two moves suited each other exquisitely, the girl moved her head to avoid the palm and her wrist was held by Yelu Yan, she quickly threw out a kick, Yelu Yan had to move back, her blade wasn't taken away. Yang Guo saw that the two girls' attacks were swift and quick and was slightly surprised. In a flash the two had hacked and slashed and seven or eight moves had passed.

At that time, ten guards burst into the room; when they saw the two girls fighting, they dashed forward. Yelu Jin said, "Wait! Sister doesn't need your help."

Yang Guo quietly said to Lu Wushuang, "Wifey, those two girls' skills are better than yours."

Lu Wushuang was angered and threw out a palm. Yang Guo slipped away and laughed, he said, "Don't get angry, it's better to watch them fight."

Lu Wushuang said, "Tell me the truth, am I better or are those girls better."

Yang Guo quietly said, "One on one, the two girls' have nothing on you. Two on one, based on kung fu only, you will lose. But they are too honest in their attacks. They can't

compare with your tricks, ruthlessness and viciousness, and so you would win.”

Lu Wushuang was pleased, and whispered, “What ‘tricks, ruthlessness and viciousness’, that doesn’t sound too nice! When it comes to trickery, no one can compare with Mister Sha Dan.”

Yang Guo smiled and said, “Doesn’t that mean you are Mrs. Sha Dan?” Lu Wushuang gave a quiet grunt.

They watched the two girls battle. Yelu Yan did not have a weapon and after many tries still could not take the girl’s saber away, and now she was forced to defend and evade with no way to attack. Yelu Qi said, “Sister, let me try.” He slanted his body and moved forward, his right hand threw out three palms in succession. Yelu Yan stood by the wall said, “Fine, let’s watch you.”

After Yang Guo saw Yelu Qi’s three stances, he couldn’t stop himself from being slightly surprised. His left hand was planted on his waist not moving, his right hand extended and pulled back, his feet didn’t move. He was able to fend off the girl’s saber, his stances were refined, and positioning accurate, he wasn’t ordinary. Yang Guo thought, “That person is exceedingly good, his skills looks like Quanzhen yet there are some things different.”

Lu Wushuang said, “Sha Dan, his skills are much better than yours.” Yang Guo was in a trance as he watched and he didn’t even hear what she had said.

End of Chapter 9.

Chapter 10 - The Young Hero

Translated by Noodles



Li Mochou felt Yang Guo's sword skills were extremely refined and ingenious. Every stance and every move of hers was predicted by the opponent and was intercepted by him. She thought her Master was really biased. She changed her stance and suddenly moved forward, leaping onto a table, her right leg kicked out, her left leg supporting herself on the top of the table. Her body moved back and forth without effort, like a leaf floating in the breeze.

Yelu Qi said, "Sister, watch carefully. I'll hit her 'Scholarly Arm' (bei ru) pressure point and she will move her body and retreat, I'll follow this by hitting her 'Big Bone' pressure point, she must raise her saber to attack. At this time the attack must be fast and then you'll be able to snatch her saber."

The girl in black said, "Huh, it won't be that easy."

Yelu Qi said, "It will be like that." As he said this he used his right hand to attack her 'Scholarly Arm' pressure point. This palm was sent out in a crisscross, blocking all her paths to the front, back and right, leaving only a space to the left. If the girl wants to avoid his palm she must retreat two steps. Yelu Qi nodded his head and indeed, he did strike her 'Big Bone' pressure point.

The girl had always remembered, "I mustn't raise my saber to counterattack." But in this situation the only way to get any sort of advantage is to raise the saber and slash down; at that time she didn't think for long, she raised her saber and slashed down.

Yelu Qi said, "Just like that!" Everyone thought he was going to snatch the saber away but who would have thought that he would take his right arm back and put his hands together in his sleeve. The girl had not slashed down with her saber yet, when she saw his arms in his sleeves she stopped momentarily. Yelu Qi suddenly stretched out his right arm, his

two fingers held the saber's blade and he lifted up; the girl could not hold on, her saber was snatched away.

After the crowd of people saw this great skill they stood there for a while, the room quiet as though empty. The girl in black stood there without moving, her face looked dejected. Everyone thought, "Second Master hasn't made another move, he's giving her a chance to run away. If she doesn't escape, what does she want?"

Yelu Qi slowly moved away and said to Yelu Yan, "She hasn't got a weapon now, fight with her again, be a bit braver and be more aware of her palms and kicks."

Yelu Yan stepped forward two steps and said, "Wanyan Ping, we are giving you a chance to run, but you still remain here and keep forcing us to fight, will you not give up today?"

Wanyan Ping did not reply, her head lowered in deep thought. Yelu Yan said, "If you want to fight with me then quickly get it over with!" After she said this she dashed forward and threw two fists towards her front. Wanyan Ping leapt back and said coldly, "Give back my saber."

Yelu Yan was startled and said, "My brother took away your weapon so we could have a fair fight, why are you asking for your weapon?" She said, "Fine!" She took the Willow Leaf Saber from her brother's hand and flung it towards her.

A guard offered out his saber and said, "Third mistress, you use a weapon as well." Yelu Yan said "No." But then she thought, "I can't beat her empty handed, we'll compete with sabers." She took the saber and tried out two slashes, the sword was a bit on the heavy side but she could use it if she had to.

Wanyan Ping's face was pale white, her left hand raised her saber, her right hand pointed at Yelu Chucai and said, "Yelu

Chucaï, you helped the Mongols kill my parents; I won't be able to take my revenge in this life. We'll sort this out in hell!" After she finished her words her left hand raised the saber and moved it towards her neck.

Yang Guo heard her words and saw that her eyes and expression was cold and mournful. His heart jumped, his chest was in pain, his voice cracked as he said, "Gu Gu!"

At this time, Wanyan Ping had raised her saber to kill herself. Yelu Qi dashed forward two steps, his right arm came out and stretched out his two fingers and snatched the saber back again, and sealed her arm's pressure points. He said, "You're fine at the moment, why must you be so short sighted?" The time it took the saber to rise and its being snatched away happened in a flash. By the time the crowd of people saw what had happened, the saber was in Yelu Qi's hand. Everyone in the room let out a call of surprise, no one noticed Yang Guo's shout of 'Gu Gu', but Lu Wushuang was by his side and heard what he had said, she quietly whispered, "Who are you calling? Is she your Gu Gu?"

Yang Guo quickly replied, "No! No." When he saw Wanyan Ping's eyes showing a feeling of hurt and grief, her expression was bleak; it was just the way Xiao Longnu had looked like when she left him. After he saw this he was sentimental and mad; he didn't know where he was.

Yelu Chucai slowly said, "Miss Wanyan, you have tried to kill me three times. I am the Prime Minister of Mongolia; I overturned your country and killed your parents. But do you know who killed my ancestors?"

Wanyan Ping shook her head and said, "I don't know."

Yelu Chucai said, "My ancestor were Da Liao's (Khitan) royals; Da Liao was conquered by the Jin. The Wanyans didn't leave many of us behind. When I was young I made an oath; I will

help the Khan of Mongolia to rid the world of you Jin. Ah... When will this cycle of revenge end?" When he said these two last sentences, he looked out of the window and thought about how helping these countries to fight for power had resulted in the loss of many lives; mountains of bodies and rivers of blood were a result.

Wanyan Ping had no reply, she revealed a few of her white teeth as she bit down on her lip; she gave a grunt and said to Yelu Qi, "I failed three times because my abilities aren't good enough; I want to leave it at that. I want to kill myself, what does that have to do with you?"

Yelu Qi said, "If Miss promises that she won't come back to seek revenge again then you can go!"

Wanyan Ping gave another 'huh' sound and stared angrily. Yelu Qi used the handle of the Willow Leaf Saber and touched her waist lightly, unsealing her pressure points. He then threw the saber back towards her. Wanyan Ping struggled to catch it but eventually did, she said, "Master Yelu, you have let me go many times and have held back each time, do you think I don't know this? It's just that the debts between the Wanyans and Yelu's are as deep as the sea, I must avenge my parents."

Yelu Qi thought, "That girl insists on following us, and she's not weak; if I leave father's side just a few steps what will happen then? Ah, why don't I force her into coming after me only?" He clearly said, "Miss Wanyan, you are seeking revenge on behalf of your parents, I admire your will. It's just that the older generation's matters should be dealt with by the older generations. We juniors have our own debts. The matter between our families should be dealt with between us; if you want to take revenge, find me. If you go after my father again, then next time we meet I will not make it easy for you."

Wanyan Ping said, "Huh, my martial arts aren't as good as yours, how can I avenge my parents? Just leave it, leave it." She turned around to exit. Yelu Qi knew that as soon as she leaves she plans to end her life. He wanted to save her and chuckled, "Huh, the Wanyan girl has no will."

Wanyan Ping stopped and turned around and said, "How do I have no will?"

Yelu Qi chuckled and said, "You are correct when you said my skills are higher than yours, but what's so good about that? It's only because I have been taught by a great Master, and not because I have some kind of great ability. Your "Iron Palm" kung fu is one of the best palm techniques; it's just that the person who taught you has not reached a refined stage. You have only begun to practice it recently; of course it will be hard for you to defeat enemies with it. You are young, all you've got to do is to find a better Master, can't you do this?" Wanyan Ping was angry originally but after hearing these words she nodded.

Yelu Qi continued, "Every time I fight with you I only use my right hand it's not because I'm arrogant. It's just that my left hand is strong, every attack aims to hurt someone. How about this, after you've studied under a better Master, you can come and find me at anytime. All you've got to do is to force me to use my left hand and my life will be in your hands." He knew that the difference between their skills was great. Even after getting advice from a skilled teacher, it will be hard for her to beat his one hand. When someone wants to kill themselves it's just an impulsive decision; once she searches for a Master, her priorities will change and eventually the thought of killing herself will have gone.

Wanyan Ping thought, "You're not a god! I'll practice hard; do you think I won't be able to use my two hands to beat your one

hand?" She raised her saber in the air and slashed down and she said, "The words of a gentlemen"

Yelu Qi finished, "A whip on a fast horse!" Wanyan Ping did not look at the crowd and held her head high as she left, but her face could not hide her anguish. When the guards saw that second Master had let her go, they didn't dare to block her. They all paid their respects to Yelu Chucai and exited. Yelu Jin saw that this event was like heaven and earth turning upside down. Yang Guo did not show himself, he was surprised.

Yelu Yan said, "Second Brother, why did you let her go again?"

Yelu Qi said, "What?"

Yelu Yan smiled and said, "If you want her to be my sister in law then you shouldn't have let her go."

Yelu Qi's face turned serious and said "Don't talk rubbish!"

Yelu Yan saw that he was serious, she was afraid that he would get angry so didn't tease again.

When Yang Guo heard Yelu Yan say 'want her to be my sister in law', for no reason at all his heart ached slightly. He saw that Wanyan Ping was heading in a south easterly direction and said to Lu Wushuang, "I'll go and take a look."

Lu Wushuang said, "Look at what?" Yang Guo didn't reply and utilized his lightness kung fu and chased after her.

Wanyan Ping's martial arts skills weren't strong but her lightness kung fu was good, Yang Guo chased after her but only saw her again after they were outside the Colt Dragon Stockade town. He saw her arriving at a manor; she opened the door and entered. Yang Guo followed and hid by the wall. After half an hour, a light could be seen from the double

room in the western wing, followed by a long sigh. That long sigh contained much anguish, hate and worry. Yang Guo heard this from outside the window; he was startled and was moved. Unconsciously he too gave out a long sigh. Wanyan Ping heard that someone was sighing outside her window so she quickly blew out the light and went over to the wall and quietly asked, "Who is it?"

Yang Guo said, "Someone like you, someone whose heart is in pain."

Wanyan Ping was startled; she heard that his voice did not seem to carry any evil intent so she asked, "Who exactly are you?"

Yang Guo said, "There's a saying; 'When a gentleman wants revenge, ten years is not long'. You failed a few times and then wanted to kill yourself; are you viewing your life with disregard? What about your revenge, aren't you disregarding that matter even more?"

A creaking sound was heard as the doors were opened; Wanyan Ping lit a candle and said, "Please enter." Yang Guo made a bow outside the door and entered. Wanyan Ping saw that he was dressed in the clothes of a Mongolian General and was very young. She was astounded and said, "Your advice makes sense, could I have pleasure of knowing your name?"

Yang Guo didn't reply, he placed his arms in his sleeves and said, "That Yelu Qi talks big, thinking that only using his right arm makes him highly skilled. Sealing pressure points and snatching a saber away, how hard can it be if it's done with no hands?"

Wanyan Ping objected to this but because she didn't know he was teasing she didn't rebuke him.

Yang Guo said, "I'll teach you three stances and you'll be able to force Yelu Qi to use both hands. I'll fight with you now, I won't use my arms and legs, how about that?"

Wanyan Ping was shocked, she thought, "Could it be that you know some kind of witchcraft, you could blow me down in one breath?"

Yang Guo saw that she was hesitating and said, "Use your saber; if I can't avoid it then I'll die without complaining."

Wanyan Ping said, "Fine, I won't use my saber, I'll only use my fists and palms."

Yang Guo shook his head and said, "No, you'll only believe me if I can snatch away your saber without using my arms and legs."

Wanyan Ping saw that he seemed to be joking but serious at the same time. She was slightly angry and said, "I have never heard or seen someone who has your abilities." As she finished she waved her saber and slashed down at his shoulder. She saw that Yang Guo's hands were in his sleeves as if nothing was happening. She was afraid that she would hurt him so moved her saber slightly to the side. Yang Guo understood, he didn't move and said, "Don't hold back, and hack down for real!" The Willow Leaf Saber hacked down; there were only a few inches between the saber and his shoulder. Wanyan Ping saw that he didn't make body movements and respected his courage, she thought, "Is he a demon?" The Willow Leaf Saber slanted and hacked down, she wasn't holding back with this slash. Yang Guo lowered his body and the saber brushed past him; there were only a few inches in between. Wanyan Ping concentrated; she raised her saber and slashed down again. Yang Guo dodged past the slash and said, "You can add your palm attacks as well."

Wanyan Ping said, "Fine." The saber slashed across, followed by a palm.

Yang Guo slanted his body and evaded these attacks and said, "There's no harm in going faster."

Wanyan Ping started to use her saber techniques, she used her palms in between, and it became faster as she used them. Yang Guo said, "Your palms are swift, it's better than your saber techniques. Yelu Qi said this was the "Iron Palm" technique, is it?"

Wanyan Ping nodded; her attacks became even more lethal. Yang Guo's hands were still in his sleeves, it floated around in between the saber and palms. Wanyan Ping used a saber and her "Iron Palm" but didn't even manage to touch his clothes. She had used over half her saber techniques and Yang Guo said, "Careful, within three moves I'll take your saber."

Wanyan Ping respected him but still did not believe him. Would he be able to take her saber in three moves? She couldn't stop herself from holding the handle of the saber even tighter and said, "Come and get it!" She slashed her saber across using the stance "Qin's Crossing" (yun heng qin ling) and slashed across his throat. Yang Guo lowered his head and darted below the blade; he slanted his head and his forehead struck her elbow's 'Crooked Pond' pressure point. Wanyan Ping's arm went numb, her fingers lost their strength. Yang Guo moved his head up and opened his mouth; he lightly and skillfully snatched the saber away. His head moved, the handle of the saber struck her side, hitting a pressure point. Yang Guo raised his head and loosened his teeth, he flung the saber upwards a ways so he could speak clearly, he said, "How about it, are you in awe?" As he finished the saber dropped back down, he opened his mouth and caught it. He laughed as he looked at her. Wanyan Ping was startled but pleased, she nodded her head.

Yang Guo saw that her eyes were sparkling, her beauty was enchanting and moving, he couldn't stop himself from wanting to hold her, kiss her. But this was too daring, he bit down on the saber as his face blushed.

How could Wanyan Ping know what he was thinking, she saw that he had a strange expression and was slightly surprised. She felt her whole body going soft, her legs were about to give way and she would fall over. Yang Guo stepped forward, he was just about an inch away, he wanted to fling the saber away and kiss her on her eyelids when he suddenly thought, "She's touched by the respect that Yelu Qi treats her with, could it be that I'm inferior to him? Huh, I want to beat him in every department." He lowered his head and swung it; the handle of the saber touched her waist and unsealed her pressure points. He offered the handle to her.

Wanyan Ping did not take the saber; her knees bent down onto the floor and said, "I beg Master to teach me, I'll be forever indebted to you if I can avenge my parents."

Yang Guo quickly picked her up and took the saber from his mouth, he said, "How can I be your Master? However, I can still teach you a method to take Yelu Qi's life."

Wanyan Ping was pleased and said, "As long as I can kill him. I'm not afraid of his brother and sister and then I'll be able to kill his father." She suddenly thought of someone and sadly said, "Ai... by the time I've achieved the ability to kill him, will Master Yelu still be alive? I still won't be able to avenge my parents' death."

Yang Guo laughed and said, "That Yelu Chucai's life will still be there for you to take."

Wanyan Ping wondered, "How?"

Yang Guo said, "How hard is it to take Yelu Qi's life? I'll teach you three stances, you'll be able to kill him tonight."

Wanyan Ping had tried to kill Yelu Chucai three times, but each time Yelu Qi stopped her. She knew that Yelu Qi's skills were ten times better than her's, she thought that although the young Mongolian general in front of her was skilled, he may not be able to beat Yelu Qi. Even if he could beat him, there is no way that teaching her three moves will allow her to kill Yelu Qi. And to kill him tonight was even more difficult. She was afraid that Yang Guo would get angry so she didn't say anything to rebuke him. She just shook her head slightly, and her eyes showed that she was thinking that he was mad.

Yang Guo knew what she was thinking and said, "Correct, my kung fu may not be better than his. If we really fought, it could be that I would have more losses than wins. But teaching you three moves to take his life is not a difficult task. I'm only afraid that because he spared you three times you won't kill him."

Wanyan Ping's heart shook, and immediately said without any feelings, "Though he has been kind to me, I must avenge my parents."

Yang Guo said, "Fine, I'll teach you the three stances. If you have the chance to kill him and you spare him, what then?"

Wanyan Ping said, "I'll do whatever you say. With your ability, you can beat me or kill me, how can I escape?"

Yang Guo thought, "How can I kill you? If you kill him or not, what has that got to do with me?" So he chuckled and said, "Actually doing the three stances isn't anything special. Watch carefully." He picked up the saber and slowly slashed from the left to the right, and said, "The first stance, it's 'Qin's Crossing'."

Wanyan Ping thought, "I already know that move, who needs you to teach it to me?" She saw the saber coming towards her and slanted her body to avoid it. Yang Guo suddenly stretched out his hand and grabbed her right hand and said, "The second stance is the stance that you've used twice before, "The Rattan around the Tree"."

Wanyan Ping nodded and said, "Yes, it's my "Iron Palm's" trapping hand stance."

Yang Guo held her soft and smooth hand, his heart stirred and he smiled and said, "You should have learned the Jade Flesh Palm kung fu, why did you learn the "Iron Palm's" capturing hand kung fu?"

Wanyan Ping didn't know he was joking and said, "Is there a "Jade Flesh Palm"? The name sounds beautiful." She felt him holding her palm, tight and then loose, the force behind it was extremely light, she felt that this palm technique wasn't as lethal as her "Iron Palm's" capturing hand techniques and thought, "I know the first two stances that you are teaching me, could it be that just with the third stance, Yelu Qi could be killed?"

Yang Guo stared at her eyes and said, "Watch closely!" Suddenly he flipped his wrist and slashed the sword towards his neck.

Wanyan Ping was startled and called out, "What are you doing?" Her right hand was held tightly by Yang Guo, she quickly stretched out her left hand to snatch away his saber. Even though it was an urgent situation, her "Iron Palm's" capturing hand came out with great accuracy, she grabbed his wrist and pulled backwards, the saber was pulled away from his neck. Yang Guo loosened his hand and took two steps back. He laughed and said, "Do you understand?"

Wanyan Ping wasn't settled yet; her heart was jumping all over the place, and didn't understand what he meant.

Yang Guo laughed and said, "First use "Qin's Crossing" and then use "The Rattan around the Tree" holding tightly to his right hand, the third stance is to kill yourself; he will definitely rescue you with his left hand. He swore an oath to you, all you've got to do is to force him to use his left hand and he'll let you kill him without objecting. Won't that do?"

Wanyan Ping thought this would happen, she stared at him, startled.

Yang Guo said, "Those three stances will not fail; if it doesn't work I'll kowtow to you."

Wanyan Ping shook her head and said, "He said he won't use his left hand, he definitely won't. What then?"

Yang Guo said, "What about it? Since you'll never be able to avenge your parents then won't dying be a clean solution?"

Wanyan Ping nodded her head mournfully and said, "You are right. Thank you for the advice. Who exactly are you?"

Before Yang Guo replied, a girl's voice from outside the window called out, "He's called Sha Dan; don't listen to what he says."

When Yang Guo heard Lu Wushuang's voice he laughed and didn't reply. Wanyan Ping went over to the window and saw a black image, a person leapt over the wall.

Wanyan Ping wanted to chase after them but Yang Guo pulled her hand and laughed, he said, "There's no need to chase after her, it's my companion. She loves to make trouble for me."

She looked at him and thought deeply for a while, and said, "Since you don't want to tell me then I won't force you. I believe that you have good intentions."

Yang Guo saw her eyes sparkled, her expression was crystal clear, he couldn't stop himself from being filled with pity and sympathy, and he pulled her hand and sat shoulder to shoulder on the bed. He softly said, "My surname is Yang, first name Guo, I'm a Han, not a Mongol. I'm like you, my parents are also dead."

When Wanyan Ping heard his words her heart felt sad, two tear drops escaped from her eyes. Yang Guo was emotional and suddenly cried out. Wanyan Ping took out a handkerchief from her pocket and gave it to him. Yang Guo took it and wiped his face, he remembered his past and more tears rained down. Wanyan Ping smiled and said, "Master Yang, you're making me cry now."

Yang Guo said, "Don't call me Master Yang. How old are you?"

Wanyan Ping said, "I'm eighteen, what about you?"

Yang Guo said, "I'm eighteen as well." He thought, "If I'm born later than her and she calls me little brother, it won't seem right." I was born in the first month; you can call me big brother Yang. I won't be formal with you; I'll call you sister Wanyan."

Wanyan Ping blushed, she felt that he was straightforward and extremely strange but it seemed that he had no ill intentions towards her so she nodded her head. When Yang Guo saw that she nodded her head he was pleased. Wanyan Ping's face was elegant, she was slim but she's had tragic experiences, it seemed that she was born to attract sympathy and pity. But what was most important was that her eyes and Xiao Longnu's were extremely alike. He didn't consider the fact that when someone's heart is full of grief,

their eyes will be filled with sorrow and anguish. Everyone is different in this world, when he thought that her eyes looked like Xiao Longnu's he was just consoling himself. As he stared into her eyes, he imagined her black clothes were white; he turned her slim and oval face into Xiao Longnu's beautiful face. He was in a daze as he stared at her, his face revealed an expression of beseeching, of being sentimental, of affection, of love. Wanyan Ping was slightly afraid and lightly pulled her hand away, she quietly said, "What are you doing?"

Yang Guo woke up from his dream and sighed. He said, "Nothing. Are you going to kill him?"

Wanyan Ping said, "I'm going now. Brother Yang, are you coming with me?"

Yang Guo was about to say "Of course" but then he thought, "If I'm there, she will know that she has strong backup. She won't really commit herself to suicide; Yelu Qi will not fall into the trap." He said, "I'm not going with you."

Wanyan Ping's eyes showed some signs of disappointment. Yang Guo's heart softened, he was about to agree when Wanyan Ping suddenly said quietly, "Fine brother Yang, I'm afraid I won't see you again."

Yang Guo quickly said, "Why...why...I..."

Wanyan Ping shook her head she exited the manor and in a flash had arrived at the Yelu's residence. At that time, Yelu Chucai and the others were about to go to bed. Wanyan Ping knocked twice at the front door and clearly said, "Wanyan Ping wants to see Master Yelu Qi."

Some guards were about to go up to her and block her way when Yelu Qi opened the door and asked, "What can I do for Miss Wanyan."

Wanyan Ping said, "I want to test your skills."

Yelu Qi wondered, "How come you don't admit your limits?" He slanted his body and stretched out his right hand and said, "Please enter."

Wanyan Ping entered the room with her saber and unleashed three strokes with it, sandwiched between the slashes were six "Iron Palms", this "One Slash with Two Palms" attacked together from the left and right. Yelu Qi's left hand hung down, his right hand chopped and grabbed as he neutralized the three slashes and six palms. He thought, "How can I force her to go away and stop her from bothering our family ever again?" The two fought for a while and Wanyan Ping was about to use the three stances that Yang Guo taught her, when a girl's voice from outside called out, "Yelu Qi, she wants to trick you into using your left hand, careful." It was Lu Wushuang.

Yelu Qi was startled, Wanyan Ping didn't give him time to think and immediately used a stance of Qin's Crossing" and waited for him to slant his body to dodge it. She stretched out her left arm and used "The Rattan around the Tree", she grabbed his right arm, and her right arm turned over and slashed the saber towards her throat. In that short period of time many thoughts ran through Yelu Qi's mind, "Must I save her? But she's tricking me into using my left hand, once I use it my life will be in her hands. How can a gentleman stand by and do nothing?"

Yang Guo had seen through Yelu Qi's thoughts, once the three stances were out, he would definitely try to rescue her, but he couldn't have predicted that Lu Wushuang will have popped up and messed with the plan, informing Yelu Qi of the danger.

The plan wouldn't have worked, but Yelu Qi was heroic and generous, he knew that if he saved her his life would be hers.

In this danger he still stretched out his left hand and blocked Wanyan Ping's right wrist, his wrist turned and took her Willow Leaf Saber. After these three stances, each one of them took two steps back. Yelu Qi didn't wait for her to open her mouth and threw the saber back and said, "You have forced me to use my left hand, you can kill me but I have one request."

Wanyan Ping's face was pale and said, "What is it?"

Yelu Qi said, "I beg you not to harm my father." Wanyan Ping gave a 'humph' grunt and walked forward, she raised the saber; under the candlelight she could see that he was still calm, and saw his manly air. She thought about how he used his left hand to save her, how could she hack him down? The intent to kill in her eyes slowly turned to peace, she threw down her saber and left.

She ran without thinking and someone followed her steps until she arrived at a stream outside the town. She stared at the reflection of the stars in the stream, her mind and heart in a mess. After a while, she sighed.

Suddenly, a sighing noise could be heard from behind. Wanyan Ping was startled, she turned around and saw someone standing behind her; it was Yang Guo. She called out 'Brother Yang' and didn't say anything else.

Yang Guo went forwards and held her hands; he consoled her, "Avenging your parents isn't an easy thing to do. There is no rush."

Wanyan Ping said, "You saw everything?" Yang Guo nodded. Wanyan Ping said, "Of course it will be hard for one as useless as me to avenge their parents. All I need is half your ability and I wouldn't be in this situation."

Yang Guo took her hand and led her to under a tree where they sat next to each other and said, "Even if you learned everything I know, what use is it? Although you can't avenge your parents now, at least you know who to take revenge against; won't you have chances again in the future? What about me? I don't even know how my father died, let alone who killed him, I can't even talk about revenge."

Wanyan Ping froze and said, "Your parents were killed by someone too?"

Yang Guo sighed and said, "My mother died from an illness, my father died without reason. I never saw my father."

Wanyan Ping said, "How do you know?"

Yang Guo said, "By the time I was born, my father had died. I ask my mother how did my father die, who is our enemy? Every time I asked mother she would always end up in tears and wouldn't reply. After a while I stopped asking. At that time I thought it wouldn't be too late if I asked her when I get a bit older; but I didn't think that mother would die suddenly. Before she died I asked her again. Mother just shook her head and said, "Your father... your father... ai... son, don't ever, ever think about revenge. Promise mother that you'll never think about avenging your father." I was sad and grief stricken, I called out, "I won't promise, I won't promise!" Mother didn't breathe again and died. Ai...tell me what should I do?" He wanted to say these words to console Wanyan Ping but after he finished he himself was sad. There's a saying, 'One mustn't live under the same sky as the person who killed your father'. If someone didn't avenge their father, that is the most unfilial thing to do; they would suffer disgrace and humiliation and be despised by other people. Yang Guo didn't even know the name of his father's killer; he had hidden this matter in his heart for a long time,

now that he got it off his chest, his voice was filled with sadness and anger.

Wanyan Ping said, "Who brought you up?"

Yang Guo said, "Who else? It was me of course. Once my mother died I wandered around the world of Jianghu, I asked for a meal here and pleaded for shelter there, sometimes I couldn't endure hunger any longer and would steal a melon or a potato from a family. I always got caught and got beaten for a while. Look, I have many scars, my bones stick out, and these are all from when I got beaten when I was younger." He smiled and rolled up his leg for her to see. The stars and moonlight was indistinct, Wanyan Ping could not see clearly, Yang Guo took her hand and rubbed it over the scars on his lower leg. Wanyan Ping could make out the bumps of the scars and couldn't stop her heart from aching. She thought about herself, how although she has lost her family, her father had many old friends and acquaintances, and had left money and treasures; compared to him, she was a lot more fortunate.

The two were silent for a while, Wanyan Ping pulled her hand lightly away from his leg but her hand was still held by him, she quietly asked, "How did you learn your great martial arts? And how did you become a Mongolian official?"

Yang Guo smiled and said, "I'm not a Mongolian official. I'm wearing Mongolian clothes so I can hide from my enemy."

Wanyan Ping was pleased and said, "That's good."

Yang Guo asked, "What's good?"

Wanyan Ping's face turned slightly red and said, "The Mongols are the mortal enemies of the Jin, of course I hoped that you weren't a Mongolian official."

Yang Guo held onto her soft and smooth hand, his mind wasn't settled, and said, "If I was a Jin official, how would you treat me?"

When Wanyan Ping saw that he was handsome and skilled in martial arts, she had liked him a bit, and now in her troubled times she had his help. She heard about his past and sympathized with him even more. Right now, she heard his voice had some ill intent but she was not angry and sighed, saying, "If my father was alive, whatever you wanted, my father could have given it to you. Now my parents are gone, what use is there in talking about it?"

Yang Guo heard her voice was gentle and peaceful, he stretched out his hand and placed it on her shoulder and whispered into her ear, "Sister, I have one request."

Wanyan Ping's heart jumped, she had an idea as to what he wanted to ask and quietly asked, "What?"

Yang Guo said, "I want to kiss your eyes, relax! I just want to kiss your eyes; I won't do anything to violate you."

Wanyan Ping had thought that he wanted to ask for her hand in marriage, and was afraid that he wanted to get intimate, if she refused and he used a little force, how would she be a match for him?

She was a girl touched by young love, her hand was tightly held by his strong, coarse hand; she was enchanted by the tangles of love. Without saying he would use force and even if he didn't use force, it was hard for her to refuse. Who would think that all he wanted was to kiss her eyes; she couldn't stop herself from letting out a sigh of relief, but there was a touch of disappointment in her heart. She felt surprise and her heart was tangled up like thread. Her eyes sparkled as she stared at him, startled, her eyes revealed a touch of shyness. Yang Guo stared at her eyes and remembered the

time Xiao Longnu left him. Her shy and loving eyes stared at him; he couldn't help groaning and he jumped up.

Wanyan Ping flinched in fright; she wanted to ask what it was but couldn't open her mouth.

Yang Guo's heart was in a mess, all he saw in front of him were Xiao Longnu's eyes. That last day when he saw her eyes, he was a young boy who wasn't yet clear about things; he respected Xiao Longnu but didn't understand what her words meant. After leaving the mountain, he had now spent a few days with Lu Wushuang; and now he was brushing Wanyan Ping's face by the side of her ear. Suddenly his heart came alive, he understood now, he now understood the affection and love of Xiao Longnu. He couldn't refrain from feeling thousands of regrets and grief. He wanted to run into a tree and kill himself. He thought, "Gu Gu loves me deeply and said she wanted to be my wife. I unexpectedly rejected her good intentions; where on earth do I start searching for her?" He suddenly cried out and threw himself forward, holding Wanyan Ping, and kissed her eyes forcefully.

When Wanyan Ping saw his forceful and mad actions she was frightened and pleased; she felt his arms were like metal, holding tightly to her waist, she closed her eyes and let him do what he wanted. She felt his lips kiss her eyes only and didn't move from them. She thought how although his action is forceful, he kept his word, but she didn't know why he kissed her eyes only.

Abruptly Yang Guo called out, "Gu Gu, Gu Gu!" The voice carried the warmth of love, yet it carried extreme sorrow. Wanyan Ping was about to ask him who is he calling out when suddenly a girl's voice from behind said, "May I trouble you two!"

Yang Guo and Wanyan Ping were both startled; they both jumped away from each other and saw someone standing by

the tree. That person wore a blue green gown.

Wanyan Ping's heart was still jumping; her face red, she lowered her head and tugged at the corner of her clothes, and didn't dare look at the person.

Yang Guo recognized this person, it was the one who had lured Li Mochou away from the inn a few days ago; he and Lu Wushuang had their lives saved thanks to that person. She had two knots of hair on her head, it was a girl; he bowed deeply and said, "I won't forget Miss's help that day."

The girl returned the greeting and said, "Master Yang, at this moment in time do you still remember your companion?"

Yang Guo said, "You are talking about..."

The girl clearly said, "Li Mochou and her disciple have just captured her!"

Yang Guo was shocked; his voice quivered and said, "Really? Is she ...she in danger?"

The girl clearly said, "She will be alright for the time being. Miss Lu said that the beggars took the codex, the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' is holding her and chasing after them. Her life will be safe for the moment but she won't avoid torture."

Yang Guo called out, "We'll quickly go and rescue her."

The girl shook her head and said, "Master Yang's kung fu is high but I'm afraid you are still not a match for the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity'. There is no use in us losing our lives in vain."

Under the flat starlight he saw that the girl's face was unspeakably ugly, the flesh on the face did not move, like the face of a dead person. When one sees it, they can't refrain from being terrified. Yang Guo looked at her a few times and then didn't dare to look at her again, but thought,

“That girl is a kind and considerate person, but she has such an odd face, what a pity. If I look at her again, I’ll show some signs of being shocked; I’ll offend her then.” He asked, “Can I have the name of Miss?”

The girl said, “There is no need to remember such a lowly name, Master Yang will know it in the near future; what’s most important now is to think of a way to rescue Miss Lu.” When she talked, the flesh on her face didn’t move, if one didn’t hear words coming from her mouth, they would think that she was a walking corpse. But it’s strange, her voice was simple, soft, and gentle, it could revitalize a tired person and make one forget their worries.

Yang Guo said, “Since it is so, we’ll rely on Miss’s advice to rescue Miss Lu. I will listen to your orders.”

The girl was courteous and said, “Master Yang please don’t be so formal, your skills are better than mine ten times over. When it comes to intelligence, I’m even further behind. You are older than me, and you are a man; whatever you say we’ll do; this young girl will follow your decisions.”

Yang Guo heard that these words were polite and gracious, his heart had an incredibly comfortable feeling, he thought that although the girl’s face was frightening, her words were gentle and soothing; one should not judge someone by their looks. He pondered and then said, “How about we follow them in secret and make the rescue when the chance comes.”

The girl said, “That’s a good idea; but what about Miss Wanyan?” As she said this she moved away and let the two discuss the matter.

Yang Guo said, “Sister, I need to go and rescue a friend, we’ll meet again some day.”

Wanyan Ping lowered her head and said, "Although my abilities are low, I can still be of help. Brother Yang, I'll follow and help you in your rescue."

Yang Guo was pleased and said, "Good, good!" He raised his voice and said to the blue green girl, "Miss, Miss Wanyan is willing to come along with us for the rescue."

The girl came closer and said to Wanyan Ping, "Miss Wanyan, you are of an important status, you must think about this. Our enemy is extremely ruthless and vindictive; people in Jianghu call her the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity'. It's really in one's best interests to avoid her." Her tone was still courteous and polite.

Wanyan Ping said, "Without mentioning the fact that I'm indebted to brother Yang, his business is my business. A friend like sister is definitely worth making. I'll follow sister and we'll be cautious."

The girl came over and held her hand and softly said, "Nothing could be better than that. You are older than me, call me younger sister."

In the dark, Wanyan Ping could not see her ugly face, but she heard her soft and gentle voice, a soft and tender hand held onto hers, she assumed that she was a beautiful girl. She was happy and asked, "How old are you?"

The girl laughed lightly and said, "Let's not compare our ages. Master Yang, what's most important now is to rescue your friend, is it not?"

Yang Guo said, "Yes. Can Miss please show us the way?"

The girl said, "I saw them heading in a southeast direction, they must be heading for Wuguan."

The three then utilized their lightness kung fu and hurried to the southeast. The Ancient Tomb sect's kung fu's forte is lightness kung fu; it could be classed as the world's number one. Wanyan Ping's martial arts may not be anything special but her lightness kung fu was not weak. How was it that the girl in blue green followed behind her without breaking speed? When Wanyan Ping was going fast, she went fast, when she slowed down, the girl slowed down, the gap between them remained constant at one or two paces. Yang Guo was secretly surprised, "What sect is that girl from? From her lightness kung fu, her skills are higher than sister Wanyan's." He didn't want to lead the two girls and so slipped to the rear.

They traveled until the sky became bright; the girl took out some food from her bag and gave it to the two. Yang Guo saw that although her blue green gown was plain and natural, its design was exquisite, it fitted perfectly to her body. On her, the gown showed off her slim, graceful and elegant disposition, it was superior to embroidered clothing. Water, food and all other supplies were prepared by her, showing off how meticulous and careful she was.

Wanyan Ping saw her face and was startled; she didn't dare to take any more glances and thought, "Is there such an ugly girl on this earth?"

The girl waited for the two to finish their food and said, "Master Yang, Li Mochou knows you, yes?"

Yang Guo said, "She's seen me a few times."

The girl took out a thin towel like object from her bag and said, "This is a human skin mask, when you wear it she won't be able to recognize you."

Yang Guo took it in his hand and saw that the mask had four holes for the eyes, mouth and nose, when he placed it on his

face it matched the shape of his face, like as if he was born with it, he thanked her with joy.

Wanyan Ping saw Yang Guo put on the mask, his face was now extremely ugly and then she understood, "Sister, so you're wearing a human skin mask as well; I'm really foolish, I thought you really were born with that weird face. I'm really sorry."

The girl gave a quiet laugh and said, "With Master Yang's handsome face, wearing this mask is asking a lot from him. With my face, it's the same whether I wear it or not."

Wanyan Ping said, "I don't believe that! Sister, could you take off your mask and let me see your face?"

Yang Guo also was curious and he too was anxious to see her face, but the girl took two steps back and laughed, and said, "Don't look, don't look, my face will scare you guys." Wanyan Ping saw that she won't take it off and so didn't ask her again.

By midday the three arrived at Wuguan. They found a restaurant in the town and had something to eat. The waiters saw Yang Guo was wearing Mongolian clothes and didn't dare to be slow; they made sure they tended to his needs first. The three were halfway through their food when they saw three females enter the restaurant; it was Li Mochou and her disciple along with Lu Wushuang as their captive.

Yang Guo thought that although Li Mochou could not possibly recognize him at this moment in time, his strange face would attract her suspicions. It wouldn't be convenient for him to act so he turned around and ate his rice, shifting his body to hear their conversation. Who would think that Lu Wushuang would not make a sound? After Li Mochou and Hong Lingbo ordered, they too didn't speak.

Wanyan Ping had heard Yang Guo describe Li Mochou and her disciples before. She was anxious and dipped her chopstick into a bowl of soup and wrote on the table, "Time to move?"

Yang Guo thought, "Even with the three us and 'Wifey' it'll be hard for us to beat the two of them. We can only win by using our brains, we can't use force." He waved his chopstick.

There were footsteps from the stairs and two people emerged. Wanyan Ping glanced over; it was Yelu Qi and Yelu Yan. The two people also noticed that Wanyan Ping was there and both were surprised; they nodded and then found a table to sit down. The two knew that Wanyan Ping had left and wasn't going to try to assassinate their father again so they left their father and brother and went traveling. They were even more relaxed when they saw Wanyan Ping was here.

Li Mochou was troubled by the fact that the 'Five Poison Codex' had fallen into the hands of the Beggar Clan. These past few days she had no appetite for food; she just ate half a bowl of noodles and then placed her chopsticks on the table. She raised her head and looked out of the restaurant; on the corner of the street she saw two beggars, on their backs their were five pockets, they were five band beggar clan members. She had a thought and went over to the window, she signaled to the beggars and said, "Beggar Clan members, please come here, This Taoist priestess has a message for your clan's chief." She knew that if she asked them to come up for no reason, they might not come, but if she said she had a message for their chief, they would definitely come. Lu Wushuang heard her Master calling the beggars and knew that she wanted to inquire about the whereabouts of the 'Five Poison Codex'; her face couldn't refrain from turning white. Yelu Qi knew that the Beggar Clan was a powerful force up here in the north, yet this beautiful priestess actually had something to say to them; he didn't know who

she was, his curiosity was roused, he stopped drinking and watched them.

In a short while, the sound of footsteps could be heard outside, two Beggar Clan members entered and greeted Li Mochou and said, "What does the Angelic Priestess want, we'll honor the request." After they greeted her they stood up. One of the beggars saw that Lu Wushuang was present and his face immediately changed, he had tangled with her before, he pulled his friend and leapt to the stairs entrance.

Li Mochou gave a wry smile and said, "Please take a look at the back of your hands." The beggars looked on their back of their hands only to see three red prints, they didn't know how on earth she managed to do this; she had used her "Divine Five Poison Palm" without 'disturbing ghosts or gods' (roughly 'completely un-seen'). The beggars didn't even know she had done anything, even Yang Guo and Yelu Qi couldn't see clearly what had happened.

The beggars were startled and both called out, "You're... you're the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity'?"

Li Mochou softly said, "Go and tell your chief, 'your clan and the one named Li have always kept away from each other', say 'the river water does not mix with the well water'. I have always admired the heroes of the Beggar Clan, it's just that I've never had the chance to acquaint myself with the clan, I really regret that."

The beggars looked at her and thought, "It sounds nice but why did you use your poisonous techniques on us for no reason?"

Li Mochou took a break and then carried on, "The two of you have fallen victim to the "Divine Five Poison Palm", don't worry, all you've got to do is return the book you stole and I will help you cure it."

One of the beggars said, "What book?"

Li Mochou laughed and said, "That old book isn't worth much, if your clan won't return it, its not too important. I'll just take the thousand Beggar Clan member's lives as compensation."

The two beggars' arms didn't feel anything strange but each time they listened to a sentence, they would look down at their hands. They have heard about how evil and poisonous the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' was; after falling victim to her, you will suffer extreme pain as you die. Their hearts were now imagining things, the three red marks on their hands seemed to be getting bigger and they heard the ruthlessness and evil way she spoke. They wanted to go and tell their elders and plan what to do. They looked at each other and hurried down the stairs.

Li Mochou thought, "If your chief wants you to live, she will definitely hand over the 'Five Poison Codex' obediently... crap! If they copy the book and return the original to me what then?" She had another thought, "My divine palm's and concealed weapons' antidotes are all written in the book, they've got the book, why will they beg me?" When she thought about this her face changed, she flew over to them and blocked their path. Two palm clashes were heard as she pushed them up the stairs. She was a yellow blur as she moved up and down the stairs. When she returned upstairs she held one of the beggar's arms and twisted it, a 'ka la' sound and the bone was broken. The other beggar was alarmed but he was loyal to his friend, he didn't run away and dashed forward to protect his friend. He saw Li Mochou coming forward and threw out a fist. Li Mochou grabbed his wrist without effort and twisted it; the arm was broken. The two beggars knew that they had suffered serious injuries in just one stance and they knew that they were out of luck

today; the two stood back to back and raised their good arm, deciding to fight to the end.

Li Mochou said courteously, "You two better stay here and wait for your chief to bring the book here as ransom."

The two beggars saw her return to her table and drink wine, her back to them; they slowly edged towards the stairs and waited for a chance to escape.

Li Mochou turned around and laughed and said, "It seems that the two of you are going to remain here only if your legs are broken." She stood up.

Hong Lingbo couldn't bear it anymore and said, "Master, just let me guard them, I won't let them escape."

Li Mochou chuckled and said, "Huh, you've got a good conscience." She slowly walked towards the two beggars.

Yelu Qi and his sister had been watching from aside, they couldn't bear it any longer and both of them stood up. Yelu Qi whispered, "Sister, run away, this woman is very powerful."

Yelu Yan whispered, "What about you?"

Yelu Qi said, "As soon as I've saved the two beggars, I'll immediately run as well."

Yelu Yan knew that there weren't many people that her brother couldn't beat; when he said that he needs to run to escape with his life, she couldn't believe it.

At this time, Yang Guo slapped the table with force, and went over to Yelu Qi and said, "Brother Yelu, how about we save them together?" He knew that if he wanted to save Lu Wushuang, he would eventually have to fight. With a skilled

person who was willing to save someone like Yelu Qi, how could he avoid dragging him down with him?

Yelu Qi saw that he was dressed in the clothes of a Mongolian general, his face was extremely ugly, and he had never seen this person in his life. He thought that if this person was actually sitting with Wanyan Ping then he knew who he was; but with Li Mochou's kung fu, it would be hard for him to win. If a normal person intervened they would definitely lose their life in vain. He couldn't reply for the time being. Li Mochou heard Yang Guo talk and examined him, his voice seemed familiar but no one can forget a face like his, and decided that she didn't know him.

Yang Guo said, "I don't have a weapon, I need to borrow one." As he said this he flew past Hong Lingbo's body and picked up the sword from her belt; he smelled her scent and said, "Very fragrant!" Hong Lingbo threw out a palm, he ducked and darted underneath it, then stood between Li Mochou and the beggars. The essence of his movements were remarkable, it was the advanced kung fu he learned while catching sparrows in the ancient tomb. Li Mochou was secretly alarmed.

Yelu Qi was delighted and said, "What is this brother's name?"

Yang Guo swung his left arm and said, "Little brother is called Yang." He raised the sword sheath and said, "I stole a broken sword." He took the sword out of its sheath, the sword was indeed broken.

Hong Lingbo realized who he was and called out, "Little punk! Master, it's him!"

Yang Guo took off his mask and said, "Martial Aunt, apprentice sister, Yang Guo greets you."

When he said 'Martial Aunt, apprentice sister', Yelu Qi was mystified; Lu Wushuang was even more surprised, "Why on earth is Sha Dan calling them Martial Aunt and apprentice sister?"

Li Mochou chuckled and said, "Hmm, how's your Master?"

Yang Guo's heart ached a little, his eyes went red.

Li Mochou then coldly said, "Your Master has taught a good disciple."

Days ago, Yang Guo had used unorthodox techniques to neutralize her most lethal stances the "Three Without Three Without Hands" technique, and after he took away her fly whisk with his teeth. His skills were strange, in fact they were unimaginably strange; although she managed to take her fly whisk back and knew that her skills were much higher than his, she pondered, "This little punk is making very rapid progress, and apprentice sister is even more extraordinary. So the "Jade Heart Manual" is this good. It was lucky that apprentice sister did not team up with him to fight me, otherwise, otherwise..." Now he's appeared again, she was secretly afraid as she looked around, checking to see whether Xiao Longnu was here or not.

Yang Guo knew what she was thinking; he laughed and said, "My Master asks after Martial Aunt's health."

Li Mochou said, "Where is she? We sisters haven't seen each other for a long time."

Yang Guo said, "Master is nearby. You will see her shortly." He knew that he wasn't a match for her, even with Yelu Qi's help it would still be difficult, so he used an 'Empty City Idea', frightening her by mentioning his Master.

Li Mochou said, "I'm disciplining my disciple, what has that got to do with your Master?"

Yang Guo laughed and said, "My Master pleads with Martial Aunt to let apprentice sister Lu go."

Li Mochou chuckled and said, "You had relations with your senior, you and your Master have done such disgusting things, in front of others, yet you say Master this and Master that, aren't you ashamed?"

Yang Guo knew that she was insulting his Master, his blood boiled up in his chest; he picked up the sword sheath and unleashed his sword skills, and fiercely attacked.

Li Mochou laughed and said, "You can do such unspeakable things, yet you are afraid of others talking about it?"

Yang Guo used the sword sheath and attacked continuously; it was severe and pressed forward without restraint. It was the sword skills left by Wang Chongyang to counter Lin Chaoying's Jade Sword techniques. Li Mochou didn't dare to be careless; she used her fly whisk and concentrated on the incoming stances. The techniques of Li Mochou's whisk originated from the Jade Sword techniques; many stances passed and she felt the opponent's sword skills were extremely refined and ingenious. Every stance and every move of hers was predicted by the opponent and was intercepted by him. If were not for the fact that she was much more powerful than he, she would have begun to lose. She thought with anger, "Master was really biased; only teaching apprentice sister this set of sword techniques. Huh, she probably wanted apprentice sister to use this to neutralize me. Although this sword technique is extraordinary, does that mean I'm going to be afraid of it?"

She changed her stance and suddenly moved forward, leaping onto a table, her right leg kicked out, her left leg supporting herself on the top of the table. Her body moved back and forth without effort, like a leaf floating in the

breeze. She laughed and said, "Did your lover teach you this move? I don't think even she will know this one."

Yang Guo was alarmed and angrily said, "What lover?"

Li Mochou laughed, "My apprentice sister had sworn a serious oath, if there wasn't a man who was willing to die for her, she would spend eternity in the tomb and never set foot off the mountain. She has followed you down from the mountain; you two aren't husband and wife, if she isn't your lover then who is?"

Yang Guo was extremely angry and didn't reply; he rushed forward with the sword sheath and leaped onto the table. His lightness kung fu couldn't compare with his opponents' so he didn't step on the top of the table, he stepped on some bowls but he remained steady and chopped across fiercely with the sheath.

Li Mochou raised her fly whisk and repelled the sheath. She laughed and said, "Your lightness kung fu is not bad! Your lover has treated you well, it could be said that she loved you very much."

Yang Guo was furious and couldn't restrain himself, he shouted, "The one called Li, are you a human? Are you speaking a human language?" He raised his sheath and quickly attacked again.

Li Mochou calmly said, "If you don't want others to know then don't give them anything to know about. My Ancient Tomb sect has come up with these two scum; we have lost all face." As she was attacking, she incessantly came out with sarcastic comments. She may be ruthless but when she spoke she was normally polite and courteous; what she was saying now was against her character. It was because she was worried about Xiao Longnu watching from the side, if she suddenly came out and attacked it would be difficult for her to fight them off,

so she kept up the insults, wanting to make Xiao Longnu so ashamed that she wouldn't appear.

Yang Guo could not bear it, if she was insulting him, he wouldn't care but Xiao Longnu was the one being insulted. With such anger, his arms and legs shivered, his head felt faint, his eyes suddenly went blank and he couldn't stand up and fell from the table. Li Mochou raised her fly whisk and attacked down onto the crown of his head.

Yelu Qi saw that this was an urgent situation; he picked up some wine cups and threw them at Li Mochou. Li Mochou heard the wind sounds and took a glance; it was some wine cups, she breathed deeply and protected the pressure points on her back. She had to kill Yang Guo now and worry about this later, thinking, why should she be worried about two little wine cups. Who would have thought that before the cups arrived the wine splashed out, she felt her 'Two Yang', and 'Central' pressure points go numb after being hit by the wine, she secretly thought, "Crap! Apprentice sister is here. If the effects of the wine are like this, what about the wine cups?" She quickly turned her fly whisk around and knocked the two wine cups away just in time. She felt her arms shake, and was even more worried, "How did she get so strong?"

When she turned around, she saw that it wasn't Xiao Longnu who shot the cups out, it was a tall young man dressed in Mongolian clothes, and she was extremely surprised. "Are there so many good fighters in the younger generation?" She saw him take out his long sword and clearly say, "The Angelic Priestess's attacks are ruthless; I want to experience a few stances." Li Mochou saw him slowly advancing, his foot steps solid. He was about twenty or so, but judging from how he shot out the cups and how he was moving with his sword, his internal energy exceeded his age. She examined him and laughed, "Who are you? Who is your Master?"

Yelu Qi bowed and said, "I am Yelu Qi, I'm under the tutelage of the Quanzhen sect."

Yang Guo had leapt to the side, when he heard that Yelu Qi was from the Quanzhen sect he thought, "He indeed is from Quanzhen; could he be Liu Chuxuan's disciple? Hao Datong can't teach something to such a standard."

Li Mochou asked, "Is your Master Ma Yu or Qiu Chuji?"

Yelu Qi said, "No."

Li Mochou asked, "Is it Liu, Wang or Hao?"

Yelu Qi said, "Wrong as well."

Li Mochou chuckled and pointed to Yang Guo, "He said he was the disciple of Wang Chongyang that makes you two apprentice brothers."

Yelu Qi was surprised and said, "It's not true is it? Elder Chongyang died a long time ago, how can that brother over there be his disciple?"

Li Mochou's brows wrinkled and said, "Hei, hei, Quanzhen has many disciples who can lie without blinking, I'm going to change Quanzhen's name into 'Quanjia', prepare!" (Quanzhen could be translated as Whole Truth, Quanjia is translated as Whole Fake.) Her fly whisk moved and attacked his head.

Yelu Qi's left hand raised his sword, his left foot stepped forward, a stance of "Fixed Yang Needle", the sword was thrust upwards, it was the orthodox sword skills of Quanzhen. This stance's air and chi were absolute, the strength, power and movement all has its fine points. At first appearance it looks very ordinary, but to reach a state where there was no weakness is incredible. People whose talent is just slightly lacking may not be able to reach such a state with a lifetime

of practice. Yang Guo had learned the Quanzhen sword techniques in the Ancient Tomb so of course he knew the essence of the sword skills; but he just learned it without really practicing it. No matter what, he would not be able to demonstrate this stance with such profoundness.

When Li Mochou saw him unleashing this stance she knew that he was a strong enemy, she strode across and lashed her fly whisk. Yelu Qi saw a grey blur move, the fly whisk's threads were to the left and back of him, sweeping in from all directions, his battle experience was shallow and this is the first time he has met a strong enemy; he concentrated and used all his strength to fight her. In a flash forty stances were exchanged, Yelu Qi coiled his sword back slightly, he saw defeat in front of him but if Li Mochou wanted to win right now, she would not succeed.

She secretly praised him, "This little punk is indeed using the refined skills of Quanzhen; although he can't compare with Qiu, Liu and Wang, he wouldn't lose to Sun Bu'Er. There are indeed many able people in Quanzhen.

A few more stances passed when Li Mochou made a dummy move. Yelu Qi didn't know it was trap, he raised his sword and thrust forward, Li Mochou suddenly threw out her left leg and struck his wrist. Yelu Qi's arm was in pain, the sword escaped from his hands. Though he was being defeated he didn't panic, his left hand slashed across, his right hand used the "Trapping Hand Techniques" to try to steal her fly whisk.

Li Mochou smiled and praised him, "Very handsome kung fu!"

After many moves, she felt that his techniques had extreme softness, Liu Chuxuan and Sun Bu'Er and the others did not have this; she was secretly surprised.

Yang Guo interrupted with an insult, "Bitch, I'll never acknowledge you as my Martial Aunt ever again." He raised the sword sheath and attacked.

Li Mochou saw Yelu Qi's sword had fallen, she wrapped the sword with her fly whisk and shot it out at Yang Guo's face and laughed, saying, "You are your Master's man; you could call me apprentice sister."

Yang Guo saw the incoming sword and raised his sword sheath forward. Lu Wushuang and Wanyan Ping both called out in alarm, but there was a 'shua' noise as the sword was shot into the sword sheath exactly. The placement of the sheath to catch the sword was extremely difficult. If the sheath was just a millimeter or so out and with the force that Li Mochou shot the sword with, the sword would have pierced his chest. However, he had learned the art of projectile throwing in the Ancient Tomb, the timing, weight and accuracy of his skills had reached a stage where there weren't any errors. The hair like 'Jade Bee Needle' would hit its target as soon as he shoots it out, so catching the sword with the sheath wasn't a difficult skill for him. He took the sword out of the sheath and attacked with Yelu Qi.

The tables and benches were all overturned, bowls were broken, and all the guests had long gone. In all the time that Hong Lingbo had been with her Master, she has never seen her losing in battle. She lost out to Xiao Longnu in the Ancient Tomb because she couldn't swim. Her fly whisk was snatched away by Yang Guo but was taken back immediately and she forced Yang Guo to back away. Watching the two teaming up and attacking her Master, she was slightly worried about her but she stood to the side and watched. The three of them fought engagingly in battle; Li Mochou changed her stances, her fly whisk producing strong winds, forcing the two to wobble. In a flash, Yang Guo and Yelu Qi faced some dangerous stances.

Yelu Yan and Wanyan Ping both called out; “Oh no.” They both stepped up to help. After using just three stances, Yelu Yan was struck on the left leg with the fly whisk; she was flung to the side and knocked into a table. Yelu Qi saw that his sister was hurt and became flustered, under the fierce attack of Li Mochou he kept retreating backwards.

The girl in blue green saw the situation was urgent, she dashed forward to take Yelu Yan out of the danger. Li Mochou’s eyes saw everything and ears heard everything. She saw that the girl’s movements were light, displaying signs that she was a disciple of a famous name; she swung her fly whisk across her face and asked, “What is Miss’s name? Who is your Master?” There was a distance of over ten feet between them, in a flash the fly whisk was swung in front of her face. The girl in blue green was startled, her right hand waved out; from her sleeve she took out a weapon, and blocked the fly whisk. Li Mochou saw that this weapon was extremely strange, it glittered like a gem, it was about one meter long and it looked like a jade flute, she searched her mind, “Which sect or family uses such a weapon?” She quickly attacked wanting her to display her skills. The girl could not hold on, Yang Guo and Yelu Qi dashed forward to help. But it was hard to defend against Li Mochou’s swift and fluent style. Stances from the east and palms from the west, in a flash danger came again.

Yang Guo thought, “All we’ve got to do is make one little mistake and our lives would be hard to protect.”

He opened his mouth and called out, “My good Wifey, sister, my sister in blue green, sister Yelu, let’s all leave the restaurant and take a break! This Bitch is very lethal.”

The four girls saw him calling out madly; no one could say a word, they frowned and saw it was now a very urgent and desperate situation. Lu Wushuang first went downstairs

followed by the girl in blue green who was supporting Yelu Yan. The two beggars saw the young heroes fighting Li Mochou because of them, they wanted to go forward and help but their arms were broken and they couldn't fight. The two were very loyal, although Li Mochou was not watching them; they didn't dare to leave before Yang Guo and the others.

Yang Guo and Yelu Qi fought together against Li Mochou's stances, which were becoming more and more lethal; they carried Wanyan Ping and retreated downstairs.

Yang Guo said, "Brother Yelu, our movements are restricted, let's go downstairs and fight." He thought that once they were in a crowded place, they would be able to escape.

Yelu Qi said, "Fine!"

The two stood shoulder to shoulder and retreated down the stairs. Li Mochou kept on attacking, although she was winning she was angry, "In my life, whoever I wanted to kill I killed; today two young punks are blocking my way, if that little Bitch Lu Wushuang escapes, where will the great name of the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' go?" She wanted to snatch back Lu Wushuang and so attacked down the stairs.

Everyone fought with all their strength; they battled from the restaurant into the street, from the street they battled into the suburbs.

Yang Guo kept on calling out, "Good Wifey, my dear sister the further you run the better. Sister Yelu and my sister in blue green, you'd better leave, the two of us won't die."

Yelu Qi didn't say a word; he was older than Yang Guo by only a few years, but he had a serious and stern air, completely different to Yang Guo's easy going, rash and hot-tempered personality. The two of them fought together against the

enemy, Yelu Qi dealt with the ruthless attacks of the enemy, Yang Guo darted around to divert the enemy's attention.

Li Mochou saw that Xiao Longnu had not appeared and was now at ease, she concentrated on the battle. The internal energy that Yang Guo and Yelu Qi had accumulated could not compare with Li Mochou's. As they battled to this point, the two of them were red faced and out of breath.

When Li Mochou saw this she was pleased, "In under an hour I'll be able to take their lives."

At this moment, the air was suddenly filled with the calls of birds, the calls were clear, two large eagles attacked her head, four wings created gusts of wind, dirt and dust filled the area, the force of the calls was tremendous.

Yang Guo knew that it was the pair of eagles that belonged to the Guo couple. When he was younger, he had played with the eagles on Peach Blossom Island; since the eagles were here, the Guo couple would be nearby. He had expelled himself from Chongyang Palace and didn't want to see Guo Jing again; he quickly leapt back many steps and put on the human skin mask.

The eagles flew left and right, up and down, their wings attacking Li Mochou incessantly. The two eagles had a very good memory; they kept in their hearts what had happened years ago when they suffered the pain of the 'Soul Freezing Needles'. When they saw her from faraway they immediately came and attacked, but they were still afraid of her needles, every time she waved her hands, they quickly circled around.

Yelu Qi was watching carefully and knew that it would be hard for the two eagles to win, he called out, "Brother Yang, let's go again, how would she cope with the four of us?" He was about to dash forward when he heard the sounds of

horse hoofs from the southeast; a horse was galloping straight for this place.

The horse was extremely fast, by the time the sounds of hoof beats reached him, the horse was in front of him, it was long and tall, covered in red fur, its spirit was amazing.

Li Mochou and Yelu Qi were both startled, “How can this horse gallop so fast?” There was a girl in red on the horse’s back; the girl and horse looked like an oncoming flame, the only thing that wasn’t red was the girl’s white face. Yang Guo saw the eagles and red horse and knew that it was the daughter of Guo Jing and Huang Rong, Guo Fu. He saw her reign in the horse, the horse immediately held its ground. The horse stopped after being ordered to, it didn’t make a sound and was composed. Yelu Qi grew up in Mongolia, he has seen countless spirited horses; but one with such a magnificent air he had never seen, he couldn’t stop himself from being surprised. He didn’t know that this horse was a blood sweating precious horse that Guo Jing obtained from the plains of Mongolia. Then it was just a foal, now it was grown up and could be said to be in its senior years; but this extraordinary horse was different from other horses in old age, its bones and muscles were extremely strong, it hadn’t lost any of its strength in its transition to old age.

Yang Guo hadn’t seen Guo Fu for a long time. He remembered she was an arrogant and bullying little girl; now she had grown into a young girl who was as pleasant as a spring flower. After riding urgently for a time, sweat had formed on her forehead; her cheeks reflected her red dress and looked even more glamorous. She looked at the eagles for a while and then glanced at Yelu Qi and the others. She saw Yang Guo dressed in the Mongolian uniform wearing the human skin mask; his face was extremely strange, she frowned, showing signs of disrespect.

Yang Guo and she had never got along since they were young. He saw her looking at him with disgust and his feelings of hate and humility were strengthened. He thought, "You don't respect me but does that mean that I want you to look upon me with respect? Your father is a living hero, your mother is the chief of the Beggar Clan, your grandfather is one of the prominent martial artists in the world; there is no one who doesn't look at the Guo family with respect. What about my father and mother? My mother was a country girl and I don't know who my father was. He died without reason. I don't want to compare myself with you; I was born into hardship, and suffered the abuse of others. If you try to insult me again I won't care."

He stood aside, feeling hurt and wretched; he felt that no one in the world looked upon him highly; there was no good reason to live on in this world. Only his Master Xiao Longnu treated him with love, but where is she now? Is there going to be a day in this lifetime when they will see each other again? His heart was filled with sorrow; he heard the sound of horse hoofs and two more horses rode arrived. One of the horses was grey, the other yellow, they both were good quality animals but there was a big gap when compared to Guo Fu's red horse. On the horses were two young men, both of them wearing yellow.

Guo Fu called out, "Wu Brothers, it's the evil woman again."

The young men on the horse were the Wu brothers, Wu Dunru and Wu Xiuwen. Both of them saw Li Mochou; she was the person who killed their mother. In these past few years there wasn't a day when they didn't remember this. Who could have thought that they would meet again here; they quickly leapt off the horses, each drew out a long sword and attacked from the left and right.

Guo Fu called out, "I'm going as well." She took out a precious sword by the horse's reigns and leapt off the horse to help.

Li Mochou saw that the longer the battle went on the more enemies there were; even though they were young. As soon as the two young men came forward, their faces and eyes red, they fought fiercely with their lives; the sword techniques refined showing that they were under the tutelage of a famous Master. The young girl in red joined in as well; as soon as she attacked the tip of her sword quivered slightly, sparkling in the eye, the sword thrust forward. Buried within the stance was an extremely lethal secondary aim, though the internal energy was weak, the sword technique was profound and ingenious. Her heart shivered and she called out, "You are Peach Blossom's Island Miss Guo?"

Guo Fu chuckled and said, "So you know me." She unleashed two stances aiming to harm her chest.

Li Mochou raised her fly whisk and blocked the stances, thinking, "This little girl is very arrogant; attacking me without respect with your lowly skills. If I wasn't afraid of incurring your parent's wrath, even if there were ten of you, I'd kill you all." The fly whisk flipped around, she wanted to take away her long sword, when suddenly the sounds of wind came from each side; the Wu brothers thrust forward at the same time. Guo Jing taught the Wu brothers and Guo Fu martial arts personally; the three lived and played together on the island, their sword skills were the same. The three sword skills were tightly matched, the advance and retreat complimented each other, although it wasn't some kind of formation. As the swords came forward, the force of it wasn't weak. The three and the pair of eagles continuously attacked, placing Li Mochou in their confinement. With the ability of the three, in a little while longer Li Mochou could

definitely hurt one of them and the other two would not be able to protect themselves. But in front of her were many enemies, if she attacked forward it still wouldn't be easy for her. And if she forced the Guo couple to come out and attack, she wouldn't be able to escape; she took back her fly whisk and chuckled, "Little babies, watch how the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' fights monkeys."

She unleashed six stances in a row, every stance aimed to harm, forcing Guo Fu and the Wu Brothers to scurry, leaping and jumping around to avoid the stances, they did look a bit like monkeys jumping around.

Li Mochou stood on her left leg and laughed, she turned around and called out, "Lingbo, let's go!" The two of them hurried away in a northwest direction.

Guo Fu called out, "She's scared of us, go after them!" She ran after them. The Wu brothers utilized their lightness kung fu and followed.

Li Mochou waved and brandished her fly whisk behind her, carefree and smoothly. Not an ounce of dust rose from beneath her feet and she lightly floated away as though walking slowly. Hong Lingbo ran hurriedly.

Guo Fu and the Wu brothers increased the energy in their legs but the distance between them and the Li Mochou Master and disciple was getting greater and further away. Only the pair of eagles were faster; they repeatedly attacked. Wu Dunru saw that they would not be able to take their revenge today so he whistled and called the eagles back.

Yelu Qi and the others were afraid that the three of them would lose the battle and hurried to meet up with them; only to see Guo Fu and the others returning. They went forward and greeted them. All of them were young, and in just a few words they spoke with great joviality. Yelu Qi suddenly

thought of something and called out, "Where's brother Yang?"

Wanyan Ping said, "He left by himself. I asked him where he was going but he ignored me." She hung her head after she said this.

Yelu Qi hurried to a hill and took a look all around, only to see the girl in blue green walking shoulder to shoulder with Lu Wushuang faraway. There wasn't a trace of Yang Guo. Yelu Qi felt at a sense of loss; the first time they met they fought together to repel an enemy, though it was for just a short time; but their lives were on the line so many times and both shared a bitter hate for the enemy. Now he had suddenly disappeared without a trace, it was as if he had lost an old friend.

When Yang Guo saw the Wu brothers arrive with Guo Fu, they attacked Li Mochou; the three of them were very close, the sword skills they used were refined and in a few moves they had driven Li Mochou back. But he didn't know that Li Mochou left because she was worried about the Guo couple. It was not because buried within the sword stances were extremely strong internal energies that forced her to flee. That day when Guo Jing took him to Mount Zhongnan to learn martial arts, he had seen him show his might, defeating countless Quanzhen Taoists. His martial arts were extremely high. This was etched into Yang Guo's young mind, and he thought that disciples of Guo Jing would be ten times better than him. He thought of worrying about himself first. When he saw Guo Fu and the Wu's unleash their superb stances, he assumed that there must be some kind of ingenuity and mastery behind it. He was getting angrier as he watched. He remembered how he had fought with the Wu brothers when they were younger, with Guo Fu by the side calling out, "Hit him harder, harder!" And remembered how Huang Rong deliberately chose not to teach him martial arts and Guo Jing

with his great skills did not dare to pass on any martial arts to him. Instead he sent him to Chongyang Palace to suffer torture and abuse. He felt anger and hatred in his chest, he couldn't stop himself; then he saw Wanyan Ping, Lu Wushuang, the girl in blue green, Yelu Yan all looking at him. They looked surprised and he thought, "You believe the insults that Li Mochou called out at my Gu Gu. It doesn't matter if you look down on me but how can you dare to look down on my Gu Gu? My face is angry because I'm angry at Guo Fu, the Wu brothers, Uncle Guo and Auntie Guo. You think that I've done unspeakable things with my Gu Gu and that's why I look like this, is that it?" He suddenly ran away; he didn't follow the main roads and just ran without thinking into the wild lands. Right now he couldn't pull himself together; he thought that everyone in the world was against him. He didn't remember that he was wearing the human skin mask, although there was jealousy, hate and anger on his face, how could Wanyan Ping and the others see this? Why would others laugh at him for no reason at all? Li Mochou's infamy is well known throughout the Wulin world, who could believe what she says?

He originally was heading from northwest to southeast, but he wanted to get away from these people as far as possible so turned and headed northwest instead. His heart was in a mess, he loathed the world; he took off his mask and ran madly in the wild hills and mountains. When he was hungry, he plucked some wild fruits and vegetables to ease his hunger. He traveled further and further; within a month, his hair was wild and unkempt, his clothes old and torn, and reached a tall mountain. He didn't know that this was one of the most famous five mountains in the world, Mount Hua. He saw the mountain was dangerous and rugged; he became mad and climbed up the mountain furiously. Though his lightness kung fu was good, Mount Hua is a dangerous place, one could not climb it on a whim. By the time he was halfway

up the mountain, the weather suddenly became cold, the ground became hard, and the north wind gradually blew stronger and flakes of snow began falling from the sky. He was angry; he wanted to torture himself and did not try to find a place to avoid the snow. The stronger the wind and snow, the further he traveled. He carried on until it became night, the snow was heavy, the ground was slippery, and it became harder to recognize the paths. If he stepped into an empty space, he would definitely fall down to his death in the deep valley. He didn't care and took his life lightly; he looked up and walked forward.

After a while, he suddenly heard a light 'chi' 'chi' sound, it sounded like some kind of beast was traveling in the snow; he immediately turned around and saw the image of a person flash past, darting into a valley. Yang Guo was startled and quickly went over to take a look in the valley. He saw someone hooking his three fingers into the rock, hanging in midair. Yang Guo saw that the three fingers supported the whole body above the valley; this person's martial arts were extremely high and had reached an unimaginable level. So he politely said, "Old senior please come up!"

The person laughed, his voice shaking the valley, his fingers pulled up and he leapt up from the side of the mountain. The person suddenly shouted, "You are with the Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border aren't you? What are you doing sneaking around here in the middle of the night during a snowstorm?"

Yang Guo was scolded for no reason and thought, "What am I doing sneaking around here in the middle of the night during a snowstorm?" This disturbed his thoughts and he suddenly let out a cry; remembering how unlucky he was, suffering the abuse of others, and his most respected and loved one Xiao Longnu blamed him for not understanding and had disappeared. They would probably never meet again in this lifetime. As he cried about this, all his life's worries and all

the resentment and abuse he had suffered surfaced in his mind.

When that person saw him cry he was shocked; he heard him getting more pitiful as he cried, and was even more surprised. When the person saw that his cries weren't going to end he suddenly laughed, the laughter and crying joined together and shook the snow down from the mountaintops.

When Yang Guo heard the laugh, his crying stopped and he angrily said, "What are you laughing at?"

The person laughed and said, "What are you crying about?"

Yang Guo was about to reply hatefully when he remembered this person's martial arts were extraordinary; he calmed down his anger and politely bowed and said, "Junior is Yang Guo, I hereby greet Senior."

The person held a bamboo rod in his hand, and he lightly pushed him on the arm. Yang Guo did not feel any great force yet his body couldn't stop from falling backwards. With the force of that push, one would fall down and have to struggle to get up. But he had learned the "Toad Stance" where one's legs are above their head; he flipped over in the air and remained upright.

Neither of them could have guessed what had just happened. With Yang Guo's present abilities, making him fall in one push wasn't easy, even Li Mochou or Qiu Chuji and the like couldn't do this to him. The other person saw him standing up steadily after flipping over in midair, he widened his eyes and looked at him and asked, "Why are you crying?"

When Yang Guo examined him, he was a white haired and bearded old man; the clothes on him were old and torn. It appeared that he was a beggar. Although it was dark, the white snow reflected off him, there was a red glow to his face,

yet he looked graceful. Yang Guo's respect for him became evident and he replied, "I'm a person with a life full of despair, there is no point in living, I should just die."

The old beggar heard that his voice was full of resignation and resentment; the beggar nodded his head and asked, "Who's bullying you? Quickly tell Grandpa."

Yang Guo said, "My father was killed by someone, but I don't know who. My mother died from illness, there is no one left in the world who loves or cares for me."

The old beggar gave an 'en' grunt and said, "That is sad. Who is the Master who taught you kung fu?"

Yang Guo thought, "Auntie Guo technically was my Master but she didn't teach me any martial arts. Mentioning the Quanzhen Taoists fills me with hate. Ouyang Feng is my godfather, not my Master. My kung fu was taught by Gu Gu, but she said she wants to be my wife. If I said she is my Master she will be angry. Wang Chongyang and Lin Chaoying ancestors left their martial arts in the stone rooms, how can I say they are my Master? I have many Masters but I can't mention any of them."

This question disturbed his feelings again and he let out a cry again, calling out, "I don't have a Master, I don't have a Master!"

The old beggar said, "Fine, fine! If you don't want to say, that's fine."

Yang Guo sobbed, "It's not that I don't want to say, it's just that I don't have one."

The old beggar said, "If you haven't got one, you haven't got one, what need is there for crying? Do you know the Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border?"

Yang Guo said, "I don't know them."

The old beggar said, "I saw you alone in the dark and thought that you were the friend of the Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border, since you aren't then that's good."

This person was the "Nine-Fingered Wondrous Beggar", Hong Qigong. After he passed on the position of the Chief of the Beggar Clan to Huang Rong, he traveled alone, savoring the world's finest foods. The weather in Guangdong was pleasant and the amount of exquisite foods endless. Afterwards he went to Lingnan and he had all the food he wanted; for the last ten years he had not returned to the central plains.

In the lands of Guangdong, poisonous snakes were used in soups, tough cats were used in stews, fishes were like mice, the prawns were like dragons, fat snails were fried, dragon lice were steamed, the roast piglets had crisp skin and the flesh of simmered fruit was red. Hong Qigong was in heaven, his pleasure boundless. Whenever he saw injustice, he would secretly help; he killed evil doers and punished traitors with his abilities. No one knew where he was or where he went. Sometimes he would listen in on some Beggar Clan members talking; he knew that under the orders of Huang Rong and Lu Youjiao, the Beggar Clan was calm. The internal fight between the 'dirty' clothed and 'clean' clothed factions was subsiding; so had the outside force of the Jin and the Iron Palm Clan. He had no worries; everyday he would just open his mouth, chew and swallow.

This year, the second clown of the Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border killed some innocents in cold blood, killing numerous people. Hong Qigong wanted to take revenge; he was going to kill that clown, but thought killing one person is easy, finding the other four would be hard. So he secretly followed the second clown, waiting for him to meet up with the other four and then he would kill them all at once. But he didn't

predict that he would have to follow him north for thousands of li, eventually winding up at Mount Hua. Right now, four clowns were present, only the first one had yet to arrive. In the middle of the night, Hong Qigong bumped into Yang Guo in the snow.

Hong Qigong said, "Let's stop chatting, I can see you are hungry, let's cure our hunger first and then we'll talk some more." He cleared the snow, found some firewood and made a fire. Yang Guo helped him pick up some firewood and said, "What are you going to cook?"

Hong Qigong said, "Centipedes!"

Yang Guo knew he was joking and he gave a chuckle and didn't ask again.

Hong Qigong laughed and said, "I've chased the Five Tibetan Border Clowns from Lingnan to Mount Hua, if I don't have something good to eat, how can I say I'm sorry to this?" He patted his stomach. Yang Guo saw that his bones and muscles were distinguished; only his stomach was a bit paunchy.

Hong Qigong continued, "Mount Hua is the world's most cold and shady place; centipedes that are born here are soft and tender. Guangdong is a warm place, living things grow quickly, the centipedes there have tough and coarse flesh.

Yang Guo heard that he was serious; it seems that he wasn't joking, Yang Guo was confused.

Hong Qigong surrounded the fire with four stones, he took a pan from his back and placed it on the stones, he took two lumps of snow and placed them in the pan and said, "Follow me to catch some centipedes."

After some ups and downs, they came across a twenty foot tall cliff. Yang Guo saw the cliff was extremely steep and

didn't dare to leap up.

Hong Qigong called out, "Useless boy, come up quickly!"

Yang Guo hated people who looked down on him, when he heard this he clenched his teeth, his spirit rose and thought, "What's there to be scared of? If I fall to my death then so be it." His courage grew and there was more intent in his lightness kung fu when he used it. He followed close to Hong Qigong, in an extremely dangerous and slippery place; he actually managed to pull himself up.

In a short while, the pair climbed up to a peak where there were traces of human activity. Hong Qigong saw that he possessed much courage and lightness kung fu and was very pleased. With his experience he couldn't tell the boy's martial arts origins, he wanted to ask but remembered about his food so he went over to a rock and dug the soil with his hands. Not long after a dead chicken was revealed.

Yang Guo was curious and asked, "Hey, how come there's a chicken here." He immediately understood and said, "Ah, Senior must have buried it here."

Hong Qigong gave a chuckle and picked up the chicken. Yang Guo could see clearly in the reflection of the snow; he saw over a hundred centipedes, each about seven or eight inches long, biting into the chicken. The centipedes were large, had red and black stripes and were wiggling about. He had wandered around the world of Jianghu since he was young, he wasn't afraid of poison but when he suddenly saw the large centipedes he couldn't refrain from being afraid.

Hong Qigong was pleased with himself and said, "Centipedes and chickens are of an opposite nature; I buried this chicken yesterday and indeed it has lured centipedes from all over." He took out a bundle of cloth and wrapped it around the chicken and centipedes, he descended the peak delightedly.

Yang Guo followed behind wondering, "Could it be that you can actually eat centipedes? But judging from his actions, it doesn't seem like he's trying to scare me."

The lumps of snow in the pan had now turned to boiling water; Hong Qigong opened his bundle and picked up the centipedes by the tail, and threw them into the pan. The centipedes struggled for a second or two but were soon boiled to death.

Hong Qigong said, "Before it dies, the centipede excretes all of its poison, the poison in that pan is incomparable." Yang Guo threw the pan of poisonous water down the valley. Hong Qigong took out a small knife and chopped off the heads and tails of the centipedes. He took the shell off to reveal the flesh; it was white as snow and was like a large shrimp, quite an attractive sight.

Yang Guo thought, "Using this method, I'm afraid that you really can eat them."

Hong Qigong melted another two lumps of snow and cleaned the flesh of the centipede so there would be no traces of poison, and then he took out seven or eight small and large boxes from his back pack. In the boxes were ingredients such as oil, salt, jams, vinegar and the like. He placed some oil in the pan and fried the centipedes, immediately an appetizing scent flowed into the nose. Yang Guo saw that he was drooling, revealing his glutton side, he couldn't stop himself from being startled and laughed at the same time. Hong Qigong fried the centipedes until they were slightly golden, and then mixed in some other ingredients. He stretched out his hand and placed a centipede in his mouth, he lightly chewed it a few times and closed his eyes and sighed. He felt that none of the pleasures in the world can be compared with this. He took a wine gourd from his back and placed it to the side and said, "When eating centipedes don't drink wine,

otherwise the taste of the centipedes will be ruined." He ate ten or so centipedes in one go and then said to Yang Guo, "Just eat; why are you being so polite?"

Yang Guo shook his head and said, "I don't want to eat."

Hong Qigong was startled and then laughed, he said, "That's right, that's right, I've seen many heroes and good men who can kill without blinking but none of them dare to eat centipedes with this old beggar, hei-hei, so you are just a cowardly punk."

Yang Guo angered by him and thought, "I'll close my eyes and swallow without chewing, this'll stop him from looking down on me."

He picked up two small twigs and used them as chopsticks and picked up a centipede. Hong Qigong knew what he was thinking and said, "You are going to close your eyes and swallow without chewing; that's called being a scoundrel, not a hero."

Yang Guo said, "What's so heroic about eating poison?"

Hong Qigong said, "There are many people who talk big and class themselves as heroes, but those who dare to eat centipedes are few and far between."

Yang Guo thought, "Nothing is bigger than death." He placed the centipede in his mouth and bit down. As soon as he bit down, he felt his mouth fill with a sweet taste, it was crisp and fragrant and extremely sweet. He had never tasted anything like it in his life, he chewed a few more times and swallowed; he then picked up a second centipede and said, "Extraordinary, extraordinary."

Hong Qigong saw that he was eating with pleasure and was delighted. The two of them grabbed and snacked, soon the hundred or so centipedes were all gone. Hong Qigong licked

the juices around his lips and wished that there could be another hundred centipedes for his stomach.

Yang Guo said, "I'll go and bury the chicken again, and lure some more centipedes."

Hong Qigong said, "It's no use, one, the chicken has lost its attraction, secondly, there aren't anymore fat and large centipedes around here anymore." Hong Qigong stretched and yawned, he got down onto snowy ground and said, "I have rushed here without sleeping for five days and five nights; now that I've had a great meal, I'm going to sleep for three days. Don't wake me even if the sky falls down. Look after me, don't let any monsters bite my head off in one go while I'm not aware."

Yang Guo laughed, "Yes sir." Hong Qigong closed his eyes and in a short while, he fell into a deep sleep.

Yang Guo thought, "This Senior is really an extraordinary person. Is he really going to sleep for three days? It doesn't matter if he's lying or telling the truth, I have nowhere to go anyway, I'll just wait for three days."

The Mount Hua centipedes are one of the coolest objects in the world, after Yang Guo ate them, he felt a chill in his stomach so he found a rock to sit on and after a while of meditating, his body became more comfortable. Right now the sky was filled with falling snow that was like the feathers of swans; it snowed without stopping. Hong Qigong's head and body was covered with snow, he was like a lump of cotton wool. A person breathes warm air, as soon as a snowflake meets it, it will immediately melt; how did the snow remain intact on his face? Yang Guo did not understand at first but then it was clear to him, "That's it; when he is sleeping he is circulating his incredible internal energy, keeping the warm air within his body. He is a living person, but when he is sleeping he looks like a corpse, this level of

internal energy is frightening. Gu Gu let me sleep on the “Chilled Jade Bed” in hopes that I would be able to refine my internal energy to a such profound state. Ai... ‘Chilled Jade Bed, Chilled Jade Bed’.”

Dawn came. Hong Qigong’s body was buried within the snow, nothing could be seen where he was except for the fact that the snow on the ground was higher there. Everywhere was deep with snow, but Yang Guo was not tired. He suddenly heard footsteps in the snow towards the mountains in the northeast, he looked carefully and saw five black shadows approaching; their movements were rapid, the sabers on their backs glittered.

Yang Guo thought, “They are probably the Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border that senior mentioned.” He hid behind a large rock.

In a short while, the five people arrived in front of the rock. One of them said ‘ah’, and called out, “It’s the old beggar’s gourd!”

Another one’s voice quivered as he said, “He’s...he’s on Mount Hua?” The five of them were frightened; they came together and quietly consulted with each other. Suddenly, the five of them separated, and descended down the peak. The paths of the peak were narrow; one of them dashed forward a few steps and stepped onto Hong Qigong, and felt something soft below his feet. The person called out ‘ai’. The other four stopped and drew near; they wiped away the layers of snow and saw Hong Qigong lying on the ground, appearing as if he had died a long time ago.

The five of them were delighted, they stretched out their finger across his nose, there was no breathing, and his body was as cold as ice. The five of them shouted out in joy and leapt about, they were a hundred times happier than the joy they would feel if they found a precious treasure.

One of them said, "The old beggar has been following all along, he made things hard for me and he died here."

Another person said, "That scoundrel Hong Qigong has extraordinary martial arts, why would he die all of a sudden?"

Another one said, "Even if one's martial arts are high, does that mean they don't have to die? Just think, that old scoundrel is pretty old."

The other four called out together, "It's lucky that the devil has come and taken him, otherwise he'd be difficult to handle."

The one ranked first said, "Come, let's vent our anger on the old beggar by chopping him a few times. No matter if he is the 'Nine Fingered Wondrous Beggar' Hong Qigong, hero of the world; in the end, he's going to end up being chopped into seventeen or twenty eight pieces by the Five Heroes of the Tibetan Border."

Yang Guo thought, "So that old Senior is Hong Qigong, no wonder his martial arts are so good."

He had heard Hong Qigong's name and of his famous "Eighteen Subduing Dragon Palms" from Xiao Longnu before when they were talking. But Hong Qigong's appearance and behavior weren't known to Lin Chaoying let alone Xiao Longnu. His hand held some 'Jade Bee Needles', thinking fighting the five of them together would be hard, he could only ambush them with his projectiles. After hurting two or three of them, he could deal with the remaining ones. As he heard them say that they would chop up Hong Qigong to vent their anger; he was afraid that they would harm him. He didn't shoot out the needles and immediately shouted and leapt out from behind the rock. He didn't have a weapon so he picked up two twigs; he quickly unleashed his swift stances diverting the five. The five stances were extremely

fast, it was a pity that he called out first and gave the five clowns some time to prepare, otherwise one or two of them would have been hit. The five clowns were worried about themselves first and darted and dodged away to avoid the attacks.

The five turned around and saw it was a young kid with old and torn garments, his hands holding two branches, their fright now dissipated.

The big clown shouted, "Little punk, you're a little beggar of the Beggar Clan aren't you? Your old beggar ancestor has gone to heaven, quickly kneel and kowtow to us five Masters."

Yang Guo saw how they moved; their movements revealed their kung fu. The five of them had a large saber on their backs, their kung fu came from the same Master; there were some difference between their abilities but they all had the same type of stances. If it was one on one, he would definitely win, but if the five of them attacked all at once he would not be able to fight them off. He heard the big clown telling him to kowtow and replied, "Yes, junior here will kowtow to the five Masters." He took a step forward and bowed down. He kneeled and bowed according to the stance "First Greet Bow After", this move was used by Grandma Sun on the Quanzhen Taoist Zhang Zhi Guang when he wasn't expecting it. An empty container shot out and almost took his eye. After Yang Guo used the stance "First Greet Bow After", he followed with a stance of "Push the Window to see the Moon", his arms swept across and the two branches came out from the left and right. On his left was the fifth clown; on his right was the third clown. This stance of "Push the Window to see the Moon" was extremely evil; the third clown's kung fu was quite high, he quickly brought down his saber to block it. The back of his saber had been struck and his hand heated up, he almost lost his saber. The fifth clown

was struck on the leg, a 'ka la' sound was heard, although the leg wasn't broken it was still painful, he couldn't stand up. The other four clowns were angry, four sabers chopped down, 'fu fu fu fu'. Yang Guo was swift and nimble, he darted east and dodged west, the four clowns couldn't do anything to him for the time being. After fighting for a while, the fifth clown joined in, he was extremely angry and fought with his life.

Yang Guo's lightness kung fu was much higher than the five clowns, if he wanted to escape it wasn't hard, but he remembered Hong Qigong. He was afraid that if he left then the clowns will kill Hong Qigong. But he couldn't beat the five of them fighting together; he unleashed some dangerous stances and in the middle of it he bent down and picked up Hong Qigong. His right hand fought with the branch as he found a path to escape. He took a deep breath and hurried over a hundred feet. The Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border chased after him.

Yang Guo felt that Hong Qigong was icy cold, he couldn't stop himself from being alarmed. He thought that if Hong Qigong was going to get deeper into his sleep he won't be able to wake up. Could it be that he really was dead? He called out, "Senior...Senior!"

Hong Qigong didn't move an inch, it appeared that he was dead but he wasn't stiff like a corpse. Yang Guo stretched out his hand and felt his chest, there seemed to be a faint heartbeat but there were no indication of breathing from the nose.

In this pause, the first clown caught up with them, but because he saw that Yang Guo's skills were excellent, he was worried and didn't dare to fight alone. By the time the second clown and fourth clown arrived, Yang Guo had gone another hundred feet. The Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border

saw him ascending the peak and saw that there was only one trail up there. They thought, "Could it be that you know how to fly?" There was no need to rush, they followed step by step.

The mountain path was getting more and more treacherous as he went on; when Yang Guo turned around a corner he saw an extremely narrow path before him. It wasn't easy for one person to pass. By the narrow path was a two thousand foot deep abyss; the mists obscured the bottom, he thought, "This is the best place, I'll fend them off here." He quickened his pace and got over the narrow path. He placed Hong Qigong down by a large rock and turned around; the first clown had reached the entrance to the narrow path.

Yang Guo dashed over and shouted, "Ugly freak! Do you dare to come over?"

The first clown was really scared of being knocked over into the abyss by Yang Guo and hurriedly leapt back. Yang Guo stood at the entrance of the path, the morning sun was now in the sky. The eye could see a fine jade mountain, gems circled the floor of the abyss, and the sunlight reflected off the white snow; the scene was magnificent.

Yang Guo placed the human skin mask on his face and shouted, "Are you ugly or am I ugly?"

The Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border were ugly, but they weren't that ugly. The 'Clown' comes from their actions and the amount of bullshit they talk about on the road. They saw Yang Guo touch his face and his face changed. His face was yellow, looked wooden, like a corpse out of a cemetery; the five clowns looked at each other and all without exception were startled.

Yang Guo retreated to the narrowest point of the path, he used "The Kicking Force of the Leading Star"; his left leg

stood on the ground, his right leg kicked out at the sky, his body moving lightly like the wind in midair. In the blink of an eye, his heroic air emerged, even if the enemy was thousands of soldiers and ten thousand horses, I could still block them one on one.

The five clowns muttered to themselves, "Where from the Beggar Clan did this strange young kid come from?" They saw that in front of them was dangerous ground, they didn't dare to rush through and they consulted each other, "We'll wait here and take turns to leave the mountain for food, within two days, he will definitely have no strength due to hunger." Four of the clowns lined up at the mouth of the narrow path and let the second clown descend the mountain to look for food.

The sides were deadlocked, Yang Guo didn't dare go over, and the four clowns didn't dare go over either.

By the second day, the second clown had come back with food; the five clowns took big bites and ate noisily. Yang Guo was already burning up with hunger, he turned around and looked at Hong Qigong and saw him looking the same as the day before and thought, "If he is sleeping, then he would toss and turn in his dreams, but he hasn't moved an inch, I'm afraid that he really is dead. If I endure another day, I will have no strength, it will be even harder for me to defend, why don't I leave now and I may have a chance of escaping." He slowly stood up and thought, "He told me that he is going to sleep for three days and told me to look after him, I promised him with my own mouth; how can I leave him now?" He fought off the hunger and closed his eyes to rest.

By the third day, Hong Qigong was still motionless like he was on the first day, Yang Guo looked on and began to question himself, "He's already dead, and I'm still guarding him, that's too dumb. If I endure another half a day of

hunger, there will be no need for the five clowns to kill me; I will have already died of starvation.” He picked up some snow from the rocks and swallowed some, his empty stomach gradually felt a bit better. He thought, “I haven’t been filial to my parents, I have hurt Gu Gu, I have no brothers or sisters, I haven’t even got a best friend, I should stop mentioning the words ‘personal loyalty’. The words trust, good and bad echoed in his mind; I still need to guard him.” He continued, “When Auntie Guo and I were talking about literature, we talked about the meeting of a boy and girl underneath the bridge. The girl was stopped by a flood but the boy didn’t dare to miss the meeting, he held onto the bridge and died in vain. Later, that person was famous for hundreds of years. I, Yang Guo have suffered the world’s mistreatment, if I don’t keep to this promise then I’ll be even more despised by the world, even if it means death, I must guard him for three days.”

A day and night passed by in the wink of an eye, early on in the fourth day, Yang Guo went over to Hong Qigong and checked his breathing; still there was no sign of life. He sighed and saluted him saying, “Senior Hong, I have kept to my promise of guarding you for three days, it’s too bad that Senior has passed away tragically. This disciple has not got the power to protect your corpse; it would be best if I throw you into the deep valley and avoid the insults and disrespect of the scoundrels.” He picked up his body and went over to the narrow path.

The five clowns knew that he couldn’t endure the hunger and now wanted to escape; they all called out and flew over. Yang Guo gave a shout and flung Hong Qigong down the deep valley, and dashed forward to the first clown.

End of Chapter 10.

Shen Diao Xia Lu (Divine Eagle, Gallant Knights)

by Jin Yong



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Chapter 11 - A Pause from Roaming

Translated by Noodles



Northern Beggar and Western Poison have been adversaries for many years, they hated each other, how could it be that they ended up dead

together on Mount Hua. The two of them were enemies when they were alive, just before they died they were hugging each other and laughing. All the feuds and arguments that they have had over the years were finished with a laugh!

Yang Guo had dashed forward only two steps when suddenly a gust of wind brushed over his head, a person darted past and stood between him and the five clowns and laughed, "That was a great slumber!" It was the 'Nine-Fingered Wondrous Beggar' Hong Qigong. Yang Guo was delighted while the five clowns were startled and shocked. When Hong Qigong first lay down on the snow he really was sleeping, but woke up when the fifth clown stepped on him. He wanted to test the young man and see whether he could keep his promise of guarding him for three days. Every time Yang Guo checked his breathing, he would stop breathing and pretended to be dead. Now he was standing at the mouth of the path with an awe-inspiring air. His left hand made a semi-circle, his right hand pushed out a palm; it was his life's proudest work, the stance of "Overcoming the Dragon with Regret" from the "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms". The first clown couldn't avoid it; he knew he couldn't meet this stance head on but all he could do was to push his palms out and use his strength to fend off the attack.

Hong Qigong was keeping his palm's power in check; he only used ten percent of his internal energy but the first clown felt his arms go numb and his chest ache. The second clown saw that he was in danger; he was afraid that Hong Qigong's palms will force him into the deep valley so he quickly stretched out his hand and pushed the first clown's back. Hong Qigong's palm power increased; the second clown moved back, almost slipping down into the deep

valley. The fourth clown was standing behind them and stretched out his arm to support them. Hong Qigong's palms power spread through them, it spread towards the fourth clown who in turn passed it onto the third clown and the third clown spread it towards the final one in the line, the fifth clown. The clowns had nowhere to hide and nowhere to run; in the blink of an eye, they were defeated by Hong Qigong's single palm.

Hong Qigong laughed, "You five scoundrels are evil and wicked you should be able to die without complaint under the single palm of the Old Beggar."

The five of them positioned themselves into the mount posture; they flared up their chi and united their internal energy to resist the single palm but they felt the force of the palm getting heavier. Their chests felt tighter and gradually it was becoming more difficult to breathe. Hong Qigong suddenly gave out a 'yi' call showing his surprise. He took back eighty percent of his palm's power and said, "Your internal energy has its good points, who is your master?"

The first clown still had his two palms pushing out against him; he struggled for breath as he said, "We are... are under the tutelage of Master Da'erba."

Hong Qigong shook his head and said, "Da'erba? I haven't heard of him. Hmm, your internal energy can be spread mutually to each other, this kung fu is terrific."

Yang Guo thought, "To get Hong Qigong to say 'terrific', then it really must be terrific. Yet when I looked at their skills I thought they were very ordinary and none of them can beat me."

Hong Qigong asked, "What's your sect?"

The first clown said, "Our master is... is the second... second disciple of Western Tibet's Holy ... Holy Monk Jinlun Fawang."

Hong Qigong shook his head again, and said, "Western Tibet's Holy Monk, Jinlun Fawang? I've never heard of him. Western Tibet has a monk, his name is Reverend Lingzhi, he I have seen; his kung fu is stronger than yours but his skills aren't advanced. Your kung fu is good; hmm, it makes sense. Go and get your Grand Master here to fight with me."

The first monk replied, "Our Grand Master is a holy monk, the living Buddha, Mongolia's number one martial artist, all knowing and all powerful. How...how..."

The second clown noticed from Hong Qigong's tone that he was going to spare them, but with the way that the first clown was replying they were cutting off their escape route so he quickly interrupted and said, "Yes, yes. We'll quickly go and get our Grand Master here to duel with Hong Qigong. Only our Grand Master can fight with senior Hong. We juniors will raise our wine gourds and... and..."

As he said this, there came a 'duo' 'duo' 'duo' sound; a person appeared from around the corner of the mountain. His body was upside down, each hand holding a piece of rock, walking with his palms, it was Western Poison Ouyang Feng. Yang Guo's voice cracked as he called out, "Father!"

Ouyang Feng did not bother to find out what was happening and leapt behind the five clowns and stretched out his right foot and placed it on their backs; a strong energy rushed through the five clowns. Hong Qigong was shocked with the sudden appearance of Ouyang Feng; he heard Yang Guo call him 'Father' and understood that he was his son; no wonder he was so good. He felt his arm sink

as the opponent's internal energy reached him; he quickly increased his strength and returned the attack.

Since the second Mount Hua competition, Hong Qigong had not seen Ouyang Feng for over ten years. Although Ouyang Feng's mind was unclear, he practiced the "Contrary Nine Yin Manual"; the more he practiced the stranger his kung fu became, and the stranger it became the more powerful he became. Guo Jing and Huang Rong had recited a small portion of the manual to Hong Qigong; it made an impression on his kung fu and great progress in his martial arts. The final stage of the "Nine Yin Manual" is superior to the "Contrary Nine Yin Manual", although Hong Qigong only knew a little; he wasn't inferior to Ouyang Feng.

Tens of years ago it was difficult to separate the two, since then they had both met new boundaries. Today they came across each other on Mount Hua for the third time, once internal energy went out; it was indeed hard to differentiate between the two. The ones that were to be pitied are the Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border; being sandwiched between two of the world's most powerful fighters, they became the apparatus for kung fu practice. A sandbag for punches and kicks, they were cold for a while, then hot for a while, their breathing was tight and then slow, the bones all over their body made 'ka la' noises; it was a hundred times more excruciating than the most severe punishments. Ouyang Feng suddenly asked, "The five's internal energy is very good. What sect are you from?"

Yang Guo thought, "Even Godfather says their internal energy is very good; the five clowns indeed are not run-of-the-mill fighters."

He heard Hong Qigong say, "They said they are the grand disciples of Western Tibet's Holy Monk Jinlun Fawang."

Ouyang Feng said, "Jinlun Fawang compared to you, who's better?"

Hong Qigong said, "Don't know, I don't think there's much difference."

Ouyang Feng said, "How about compared with me?"

Hong Qigong said, "He's better than you a bit."

Ouyang Feng was shocked and called out, "I don't believe it!"

In between the exchange of words, the energy in the hand and foot increased. Hong Qigong sent out different levels of palm energy but they were all dispersed by Ouyang Feng's foot energy; the power in the foot increased but it was difficult to move Hong Qigong back even half an inch. After this exchange both admired each other, they laughed and jumped back.

The strong force within the Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border suddenly disappeared; they couldn't stop themselves wobbling about as if they were drunk on wine. The five had the internal energies of two great fighters circulated to and fro between them, their internal organs had been seriously injured, the muscles weakened and bones softened; they had become invalids. They wouldn't be able to fight off even a small child of seven or eight years of age.

Hong Qigong shouted, "You five scoundrels, your lifelines haven't reached their end today; it doesn't matter anyway since you can't do anymore harm, just crawl away. Remember to go and tell your Grand Master Jinlun Fawang to come to the central plains and find me so we can do a little sparring."

Ouyang Feng said, "With me too." The Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border all agreed and limped away, supporting each other as they descended down from the peak.

Ouyang Feng flipped upright and stared at Hong Qi Gong and then shouted, "Hey, your kung fu is very good, what's your name."

After hearing this and seeing the confused look on his face, Hong Qigong knew that since he went mad over ten years ago, he hadn't recovered and so said, "I'm called Ouyang Feng, what's your name?"

Ouyang Feng's heart shook, he felt that the words 'Ouyang Feng' were very familiar but he couldn't remember what he was called, and he shook his head and said, "I don't know. Hey, what am I called?"

Hong Qigong laughed and said, "You don't even know your own name. Go home and think about it."

Ouyang Feng angrily said, "You must know, tell me."

Hong Qigong said, "Fine, you're called Smelly Toad." The word 'Toad' was very familiar to Ouyang Feng, when he heard this it felt right, but there was also a feeling that it was wrong. He and Hong Qigong had been adversaries for tens of years; the hate had been etched deeply into his mind, although he didn't understand right now. Yet when he looked at him, Ouyang Feng felt aggravated.

Hong Qigong saw him standing there in a daze, a fierce glow was in his eyes. Hong Qigong secretly put his guard up, indeed he heard Ouyang Feng shout out and ruthlessly throw himself forward. He didn't dare hesitate and immediately used his "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms". The two fought in the wind and the slippery snow on a narrow path that was only about a foot wide; using their

greatest skills with great effort in the battle. On one side was a two thousand foot deep chasm, just one little mistake and they would fall to their deaths; this was much more dangerous than fighting on flat, even ground. The two of them were now fairly old, though their vigor has lessened; their study of martial arts had reached an extremely pure level. The stances were pure and profound, so profound that everything was ingenious and masterly, only ten or so moves were exchanged. The two couldn't stop themselves from admiring each other.

Ouyang Feng said, "The Old Beggar is very lethal."

Hong Qigong laughed and said, "Smelly Toad is also terrific."

Yang Guo knew that the terrain was extremely dangerous, he was afraid that Ouyang Feng would fall down into the valley; but then he could see that Hong Qigong was in distress and hoped that he too would be safe. Ouyang Feng was his Godfather, he had deep feelings for him; nevertheless, Hong Qigong was gallant, he had the air of a great hero around him. As soon as he met him an impression was left in his heart. He had endured hunger, cold, extreme dangers in guarding Hong Qigong for three days and three nights. Although they didn't say a word to each other in the three days, in Yang Guo's mind, it was as if they both endured hundreds and hundreds of life threatening dangers together.

Tens of stances later, Yang Guo saw that the two's incomparably swift and powerful attacks had changed from dangerous to safe. He soon forgot about the safety of the two and concentrated on watching the masterly kung fu that was on display. The "Nine Yin Manual" is the peak of the world's martial arts, he only knew odd fragments of it; now he saw the two use the theories of the manual within

their stances. He couldn't help himself from being shocked and surprised, he thought, "So even an ordinary sentence from the manual has so many ways to express its meaning."

Over a thousand stances passed, although the two had yet to use all their skills, their age was catching up with them. They felt they were getting out of breath and their hearts were beating faster, it was unavoidable that their arms and legs would get slower."

Yang Guo called out, "You two have been fighting for over half a day, you must be hungry, how about eating first and then carry on later?"

As soon as Hong Qigong heard the word 'eat' he immediately jumped back and said, "Great idea, great idea!"

Yang Guo had seen the fifth clown bring up cold food in a bamboo basket and had placed off to the side. He went to it and brought it over and opened the lid, he saw cold chicken and meat, white wine and cold rice; everything that was needed was there. Hong Qigong was delighted, he picked up a cold chicken and bit down with large bites hurriedly, eating noisily.

Yang Guo picked up some cold meat and passed it to Ouyang Feng and softly said, "Father, where have you been all this time?"

Ouyang Feng stared at him and said, "I've been searching for you."

Yang Guo's heart ached and thought, "There is someone on this world that actually loves me like this." He held his arm and said, "Father, you are Ouyang Feng. Senior Hong is a good person, don't fight him."

Ouyang Feng pointed to Hong Qigong and said, "He's Ouyang Feng, Ouyang Feng is a bad person." Yang Guo saw that his mind was confused and felt sad.

Hong Qigong laughed and said, "You're right, Ouyang Feng is a bad person, Ouyang Feng deserves to die."

Ouyang Feng looked at Hong Qigong and then at Yang Guo. He exhausted his strength trying to remember but his mind and memories were still scrambled. Yang Guo fed Ouyang Feng some food and then stood up, he said to Hong Qigong, "Senior Hong, he is my Godfather. He has a severe mental illness, his mind is confused, please pity him and don't make it hard for him."

Hong Qigong heard this and nodded a few times, and said, "Young man, so he's your Godfather."

Who could have expected that Ouyang Feng would suddenly leap up and called out, "Ouyang Feng, we can't find a winner using our fists and kicks, we'll compete again using weapons."

Hong Qigong shook his head and said, "There's no need to compete, let's just say you win."

Ouyang Feng said, "What win or lose? I must kill you." He stretched out his hand and broke off a branch; he took off the twigs and leaves from the branch forming a staff. He attacked downwards at Hong Qigong's head. His snake staff was famous years ago, it was extremely lethal, although there wasn't a snake at the head of this staff, before the attack arrived, the wind produced was so strong that it made it difficult for Yang Guo to breathe. Yang Guo quickly dived out of the way. When he looked up at Hong Qigong, he saw him pick up a branch and used it as a short rod, the two battled again. Hong Qigong's "Dog Beating Stick Technique" has nothing like it in the world, but he doesn't

use it casually; apart from this technique, he has many refined and ingenious rod stances and right now he was using them.

This heated battle was another spectacular fight like the last one with fists and kicks; the stick was like an elusive dragon, the staff like an efficacious dancing snake. It was like watching a rainbow traveling across the sky or a shooting star chasing after the moon, the fight held Yang Guo entranced as he watched. The staff and stick went to and fro, they fought until dusk, and again it was difficult to separate the two. Yang Guo saw that the ground was extremely dangerous; the mountain was covered with ice and snow and was extremely slippery. The two of them were old, if they fought for much longer they would definitely lose their footing so he loudly called out, telling them to stop. But Hong Qigong and Ouyang Feng were fighting with great pleasure, why would they stop? Yang Guo knew that mentioning food to Hong Qigong made him stop, so he thought that luring him with good food would be effective. So he went to the wild mountainside and dug up some mountain herbs and yams, started a fire and roasted them.

Hong Qigong smelt the fragrant scent and called out, "Smelly Toad, I don't want to fight with you, eating is more important." He ran to Yang Guo's side and picked up two clumps of mountain herbs and ate them. Although they burnt his mouth he kept on chewing. Ouyang Feng rushed over and raised his staff over Hong Qigong's head chopping down. Hong Qigong ignored him and threw him a clump of the mountain herbs and called out, "Just eat!" Ouyang Feng stopped. He caught it and started to eat it, forgetting about the heated battle they were just in.

That night the three of them slept in a cave. Yang Guo wanted to help his Godfather regain his memories and mentioned past events to him. Ouyang Feng stood there in

a daze not replying, sometimes he would hit his head with his fist, showing that he's trying extremely hard to remember but he could not, it was extremely hard for him. Yang Guo worried that he would get even crazier so made him go to sleep, he himself was tossing and turning and couldn't sleep. He was thinking about the fist and palm stances that the two used, the more he thought about it the more excited he got. He couldn't stop himself and got up quietly. Studying them, he felt that the ingenuity and mastery of the stances was boundless; he practiced into the middle of the night until he was extremely tired and went to sleep.

The next morning, Yang Guo had not yet wakened up from his sleep when he heard gusts of wind from outside the cave, in between them were the sounds of leaping and jumping. He quickly hurried outside to see Hong Qigong and Ouyang Feng battling each other heatedly again. He sighed and thought, "These two old seniors aren't acting their age, what's the point of fighting like this?" He could only sit aside and watch. He saw Hong Qigong's stances and understood every stance and every move but it was difficult for him to grasp Ouyang Feng's strange stances, every time Hong Qigong seemed to gain the upper hand, Ouyang Feng's strange stances would bring them to a level pegging again.

The two of them battled in the day and slept at night, they fought for four days running, both of them were exhausted but neither of them dared to let slip even half a stance. Yang Guo pondered, "Whatever happens tomorrow I mustn't allow them to fight again." That night he waited for Ouyang Feng to go to sleep and then quietly said to Hong Qigong, "Senior, please come outside, I have something to say." Hong Qigong followed him outside. About a hundred feet away from the cave, Yang Guo suddenly got down on

his knees, and kept on kowtowing, yet he didn't say a word. Hong Qigong was startled but understood; he knew that Yang Guo wanted him to have pity on Ouyang Feng and his illness and leave. He laughed at the sky and said, "So be it."

After only walking away for a few tens of feet, his garments were held in a gust of wind, Ouyang Feng darted out of the cave and swept out his staff angrily shouting, "Old Beggar, trying to escape?"

Hong Qigong conceded three stances to him as he tried to find a path of escape but he was held up by the gusts of wind created by the staff. When skilled fighters are dueling, one mustn't concede even half a move, Hong Qigong had the intention of conceding to him and immediately fell into danger. It was a desperate situation; many times he almost lost his life to the staff. He saw the staff heading straight for him, attacking his lower abdomen; he knew that this stance must have a lethal move to follow it. He couldn't avoid it and let him have this stance. He raised his stick to block it. He suddenly felt a powerful internal energy surging through the staff, he couldn't stop himself from being shocked, "You want to compete internal energy with me?" He thought, "The enemy's internal energy is arriving, there is no other way to defend apart from using my own internal energy to block it." He quickly circulated his internal energy and prepared to defend. If they lose concentration for a split second and get struck by the opponent's weapon or palm, their internal energy will be all over their body and will defend against the attack. Although they would be injured, it won't be anything serious. Now that they are competing with internal energy, they couldn't concede to the other one iota; they had reached a stage where it wouldn't finish unless one died. The two of them had fought each other many times in the past, and each time both were worried about their own safety and how strong the other was.

Normally they wouldn't use such a dangerous way to attack each other since they were afraid that in their quest to seek glory, they would be disgraced instead and lose their lives for no purpose. But Ouyang Feng wasn't thinking properly; he hadn't managed to gain victory in the last few days so suddenly circulated his internal energy to attack.

Decades ago, Hong Qigong hated Ouyang Feng to the bone, but now he was old and had mellowed. Now Ouyang Feng was mad and Yang Guo had pleaded for his life; Hong Qigong had no intentions of killing him, so he circulated his chi throughout his 'dan tian'. He just defended and didn't attack, waiting for Ouyang Feng to exert all his energy. He didn't know that his opponent's internal energy was like the waves of a large river, the source of it incessantly sending out waves of internal energy. After one wave, came another, there was no sign of it weakening but instead it was getting fiercer and fiercer. Hong Qigong always believed that his internal energy was profound. In these past years he had refined his fierce internal energy to new levels; even if he couldn't beat Western Poison, if he used all his energy to defend, he would not lose. But who could have guessed that after all these exchanges of internal energy, Ouyang Feng was getting stronger and stronger.

Hong Qigong remembered the time when he was competing internal energy with Ouyang Feng with the Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border sandwiched in between them; Ouyang Feng had sent out his internal energy with his foot three times, each time stronger than the last. He noticed, at that time, that before the first wave of internal energy had dissipated the second wave had arrived, after the second wave arrived, the third followed. If he just defended and let him keep on pressing, it would definitely be hard to defend against. Only by returning his own energy between the gaps and forcing him to defend will he stop Ouyang Feng

from amassing a great force. Once he thought about this he immediately circulated his internal energy and attacked. The two's bodies shook as the energies collided.

When Yang Guo saw the two competing internal energy he was extremely worried; if he attacked Hong Qigong's back, he would help his Godfather gain victory. He looked at Hong Qigong and saw a head full of white hair, and within his commanding air there was a compassionate and merciful part. In the spaces between his heroic natures there was peacefulness to go with it. He couldn't stop himself from bowing down to him, not to mention that he had responded to his plea and was willing to leave. How could he harm him?

The two of them froze for a while, white smoke came out from Ouyang Feng's head, and gradually it became denser and denser, like steam coming from a steamer. Hong Qigong had also used all his strength to defend; right now he had no way to control whether or not he would harm his opponent's life. If he could just protect himself that would be fortunate enough.

They competed from dawn until morning, from morning until midday until Hong Qigong gradually felt his internal energy draining away. However, his opponent's internal energy kept on surging towards him like a violent storm. He quietly said, "So the madder the old poisonous animal gets, the more powerful he becomes; the Old Beggar's life is going to end today." He knew that his battle would have an ending; he now had no way to avoid this and could only use all his strength to resist. But he didn't know that Ouyang Feng's internal energy was also declining due to exhaustion, it was hard for him to maintain his palm's power. They continued for another four hours until it got dark. Yang Guo saw that their faces had changed; he thought that if they battled any longer, they would definitely

perish together. The difference in internal energy between him and the two was vast. If he wanted to break them up himself, most probably he would not be able to separate them. Instead he would lose his life in the attempt. He delayed for a while and saw Ouyang Feng's face looked worried and Hong Qigong was out of breath, he thought, "Even if it is dangerous I need to save their lives." So he went and broke off a tree branch and got down on his knees between the two; he circulated his chi around his body to protect himself and stretched out his branch placing it in between the staff and stick.

Who could have known that this separation would not waste any energy? The two's internal energy rushed into the branch and after meeting his circulated chi, the energies were dispersed. A strong bow cannot pierce a silk cloth; although the Northern Beggar and Western Poison are two of the most renowned men in the world of Wulin, they had spent many days consuming and exhausting their energy. After being disturbed by his interference, the two of them fell onto the ground, their faces grey as ash and it was hard for them to move.

Yang Guo was alarmed and called out, "Father, Senior Hong, are you okay?"

The two of them struggled to breath and didn't reply. Yang Guo wanted to move them into the cave to rest but Hong Qigong lightly shook his head. Yang Guo knew that the two were severely injured and could not be moved. That night he slept between the two, afraid that they would get up in the middle of the night and fight again. The two of them couldn't even circulate their chi to recuperate, how could they fight each other? The next morning, Yang Guo saw that they looked like they were on the point of death, they looked worse than yesterday. He was alarmed and flustered; he dug up some more mountain herbs and

roasted and fed it to them. On the third day, the two of them showed signs of being a little better. Yang Guo moved them into the cave, placing them on either side with him in the middle.

They rested like this for several days. Once Hong Qigong regained his appetite he started to recover. Ouyang Feng didn't say anything but his expression was calm, Yang Guo tried to get him to talk but he wouldn't say anything.

That day, the two of them were lying on the ground facing each other when Hong Qigong suddenly called out, "Smelly Toad", do you revere me now?"

Ouyang Feng said, "Revere what? I still have many stances that I haven't used, once I use them all, you'll be beaten into dust."

Hong Qigong laughed and said, "What a coincidence, I too have many kung fu that I haven't used yet. Have you heard of the Beggar Clan's "Dog Beating Stick Technique"?"

Ouyang Feng trembled, and thought, "The "Dog Beating Stick Technique" sounds familiar, it seems to be extremely potent, could it be that the Old Beggar knows it? But how come he hasn't used it when we've been fighting for our lives? He's probably used it already. Or, he doesn't know it." So he said, "What's so special about the "Dog Beating Stick Technique"?"

Hong Qigong was regretful; during the days when he was fighting with him, all he had to do was just use a few stances of the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" and he would definitely be able to subdue him. But he felt that Ouyang Feng was mentally unstable so he already has an advantage over him. Using the Beggar Clan's treasured "Dog Beating Stick Technique" against him wouldn't be fair. It was not the actions of a hero. But who knew that although his mind was

unstable, his kung fu did not decline one bit. In the end, both of them ended up seriously injured. He wanted to use this set of skills but he had no energy to do so. When he heard Ouyang Feng ask this question he couldn't take it and had a thought, he signaled to Yang Guo telling him to lower his ear and said, "I am the Beggar Clan's previous chief, do you know that?"

Yang Guo nodded, in Chongyang Palace he heard the Taoists talk about the famous people of the world. They said that the Beggar Clan's previous chief the "Nine Fingered Wondrous Beggar" Hong Qigong had supreme martial arts and was courageous, a real hero.

Hong Qigong said, "I have a set of techniques that I'm going to teach you. This set of techniques is passed onto the Beggar Clan's chief only and never to outsiders. Because your Godfather is belittling me with his words, I want you to perform it for him to see."

Yang Guo said, "Since this skill of Senior's is never passed on to outsiders, this junior will not learn it. My Godfather's mind hasn't recovered yet, there is no need for Senior to torment him."

Hong Qigong shook his head and said, "If you learn the stances but don't know the formulae to accompany it, should you face an enemy, it would be useless. And so, you can't really say that I'm teaching you kung fu. I don't want you to attack your Godfather, just demonstrate it to him and once he sees it, he will understand."

Yang Guo thought, "Since that this set of kung fu is a treasure of the Beggar Clan, my Godfather may not be able to beat it; why should I help you to defeat my Godfather?" He rejected the offer, saying that he can't learn the secret skill of the Beggar Clan.

Hong Qigong saw through him and loudly said, “Smelly Toad”, your Godson knows that you can’t beat my “Dog Beating Stick Technique”, he doesn’t dare to demonstrate it to you.”

Ouyang Feng was angry and called out, “Son, I have many great skills that I haven’t used yet, why should I be afraid of him? Quickly demonstrate it for me.”

The two were forcing him, he had no other response but to go over to Hong Qigong’s side. Hong Qigong told him to take a branch and taught him a stance of the “Dog Beating Stick Technique”, “The Stick Beats Two Dogs”, carefully describing it to him. Yang Guo understood immediately and demonstrated it. Ouyang Feng saw that the stick technique was indeed wondrous and powerful, it would be difficult for him to overcome it straight away, he thought for a while and taught a staff technique stance to Yang Guo.

Hong Qigong gave a slight smile and said, “Fine, here’s another stance.”

The two of them then compared martial arts with their mouths and tongues. They continued until night fell, only ten or so moves were exchanged yet Yang Guo was exhausted and sweating all over. The next morning they continued, and they carried on for three days, by then, the thirty six stances of the “Dog Beating Stick Technique” were described. Though there were only thirty six stances, the changes in between them had boundless ingenuity, in the end, Ouyang Feng took longer and longer to come up with a solution. But the stances that he came up with attacked and defended at the same time, the strength and power of them was excellent; when Hong Qigong saw this he let out a sigh of respect.

By the night of that day, Hong Qigong described the thirty-sixth stance “No Dogs Under Heaven” sixth change. This was the “Dog Beating Stick Technique’s” final stance and final change; once this stance was used, there would be a stick everywhere and when the internal energy arrived, had there been eighty evil dogs, all of them would be killed at the same time. It was called “No Dogs Under Heaven” because of this, the ingenuity and mastery of the rod technique had reached the highest echelons of martial arts. Ouyang Feng couldn’t think of a reply. He spent that night tossing and turning as he pondered that stance.

Before Yang Guo woke up the next morning, Ouyang Feng suddenly called out, “I’ve got it... I’ve got it. Son, use this staff stance to break his.” His voice was excited and urgent at the same time. Yang Guo could hear that there was something wrong with him, he took a look and was shocked. Though Ouyang Feng was old, his internal energy was profound, so the hair on his face and head was grey white in colour; but he had exerted himself too much that night thinking. In just a night his hair became completely white, as if he’d suddenly aged ten years.

Yang Guo was sad, he wanted to ask Hong Qigong to stop the competition, but Ouyang Feng repeatedly forced him to do as he said, in the end he could only comply. This stance was extremely complicated, Ouyang Feng repeated it and explained it until Yang Guo understood and did as he was instructed. When Hong Qigong saw this stance his face changed. He was lying on the floor, unable to move; suddenly he somehow gained divine strength and leapt up calling out, “Old poisonous animal, Ouyang Feng! Today, Old Beggar is in awe of you.” He jumped forward and hugged him tightly. Yang Guo was startled, he assumed that he was trying to harm his Godfather. He tried to pull him away but Hong Qigong was holding on tightly, he was unable to pull

him away. He heard Hong Qigong laugh and called out, "Old poisonous animal, Ouyang Feng, you actually thought of a stance to break mine, you really are something! Good Ouyang Feng, good Ouyang Feng."

After many days of fighting and a whole night of thinking, Ouyang Feng had exhausted all his strength. When he heard Hong Qigong call him 'Ouyang Feng' three times, suddenly something lit up in him. His mind was like a mirror, all the events of the past came before his very eyes; he also laughed and called out, "I'm Ouyang Feng! I'm Ouyang Feng! I'm Ouyang Feng! You're the Old Beggar Hong Qigong!"

The two white haired men hugged each other and laughed. After a bout of laughter, the voices became quieter, then suddenly stopped, and the two of them lay motionless.

Yang Guo was shocked and kept on calling out, "Father, Senior!" neither replied. Yang Guo pulled Hong Qigong's arm, but as soon as he did so the arm hung limp, he was dead. Yang Guo was startled and bent over to take a look at Ouyang Feng; he too had all lost signs of being alive. Though the two's laughter has ended, their faces still held a smile, and the valley quietly echoed back the sounds of two people laughing. Northern Beggar and Western Poison had been adversaries for many years and they hated each other. And now they ended up dead together on Mount Hua. The two of them were enemies when they were alive, but just before they died they were hugging each other and laughing. All the feuds and arguments that they have had over the years were ended with a laugh!

Yang Guo was shocked and sad at the same time; he had no idea what to do. He remembered that Hong Qigong pretended to be dead for three days and three nights, could it be that the two of them were pretending to be dead? But

judging from how they looked, it didn't appear that they were pretending. He thought, "Maybe after dying for a while they'll come back to life. Their martial arts are extremely good; they wouldn't die just like that. Maybe they are competing again, seeing who can fake death the longest."

He guarded the two for seven days and nights and every time a day passed, a bit of his hope drained away. He saw that the two's faces had changed colour and knew then that they had really passed away. He sobbed for a while, and then, in the side of the cave, he dug two holes and buried the two extraordinary figures of the Wulin world. The weapons they used and Hong Qigong's wine gourd were buried with them. He saw that the footprints that the two had left when they were fighting had turned to ice, the prints were still here yet their bodies have now been placed in the ground. Yang Guo stepped into the footprints and reminisced, he couldn't stop himself from being depressed again. He then thought about how even with their frightening abilities, in the end they were buried by someone the world despised. What is fame, what is reputation; it's just a dream that's finished.

He kowtowed eight times in front of their tombs, thinking, "Though Godfather was brilliant, in the end he was a level below Hong Qigong." When the "Dog Beating Stick Techniques" were demonstrated, Godfather had to think for quite a while before he overcame them, if he really faced this in battle, who would allow him to carefully study it and then think of a way to counter it?"

After many sighs, he found a path down the mountain and left it behind. This time when he was leaving the mountain, he was trusting in his footsteps again, he didn't distinguish between east, south, west or north. He thought that since the world is a large place, he was alone, he would wander

around and when his time comes, he'll lie on the ground somewhere and die. He hadn't been on Mount Hua for a month, yet to him it was like many years had passed. When he was ascending the mountain, he was thinking about how everyone looked down on him, he was full of hate and anger. As he descended, he felt life was like a passing cloud, if others respect him or look down on him it's all the same. What's it have to do with him anyway? At such a young age, he was resentful of the world's customs, he won't rise in respect for the world.

Within a day's time he arrived at a wild place in Xianan; he took a look around and saw withered trees and wilted grass everywhere. The grass was fluttering in the wind. The sound of quiet hoofs could be heard in the west, dust and smoke rose, after a short while, tens of wild horses galloped past about a mile or so in front of him. He saw the herd of horses galloping wildly, freely, Yang Guo also felt carefree and joyous. With wild lands in front of his eyes and horses galloping afar, the world was vast and had no obstructions. Just as he was feeling satisfied he suddenly heard a horse hissing out for mercy from behind.

Yang Guo turned around and saw a yellow haired skinny horse pulling a cart of firewood slowly along the main road. He thought that the horse must have seen the other horses galloping freely in the wild lands. It was toiling with hard work and it hissed out as it lamented for itself. The horse was so skinny that its breast bone was sticking out, its four legs had no muscle and they were as thin as branches. Its fur was patchy, its skin was covered in scabies, and there were numerous traces of blood from wounds caused by whipping. A rude man was sitting on the cart, he disliked that the horse was going slow and whipped it incessantly. Yang Guo has suffered by others many times before; when he saw the horse suffering such punishment, it felt like he

himself was suffering the whippings. His chest ached and tears almost escaped from his eyes. He stood in the road and angrily shouted, "Hey you, why are you whipping the horse?"

The rude man saw a kid in torn and old garments looking like a beggar blocking the road, he raised his whip and shouted, "Move out of the way now, don't you want your life?" As he said this he slapped his whip on the horse's back again. Yang Guo was furious and called out, "If you hit the horse again, I'll kill you." The man laughed and lashed out at Yang Guo's head. Yang Guo stretched out his hand to take the whip and turned it around. He swung the whip and it made a tangling loop around the man's neck and pulled him down, beating him on the head and face. Although the skinny horse was ugly, it was very lively, when it saw the man getting beaten; it neighed with delight and stretched out its head rubbing Yang Guo on the leg, displaying signs of affection. Yang Guo pulled apart the cart's collar and harness then patted the horse on the back. He pointed in the direction of the other horse's trail and said, "Go, no one's going to harm you anymore."

The horse reared and neighed, and galloped forward. But the horse's body was weak; he wasn't able to continue this sudden burst. It galloped for around a hundred feet then its front legs weakened and it fell onto the ground. Yang Guo couldn't bear it, he ran over and picked up the horse by its stomach and shouted, "Up", pulling the horse back onto its feet. The man saw Yang Guo's unbelievable strength and was frightened, so frightened that he didn't want his cart of firewood. He picked himself up and ran. About half a mile away, he shouted, "There's someone strong stealing horses and firewood!"

Yang Guo thought this was funny. He pulled up some green grass for the horse. He saw that the horse had such an

unfortunate life and couldn't help but feel linked with it. He stroked the horse's neck and said, "Horse, horse, follow me from now on." He held its rope and walked slowly to a town. He bought some barley for the horse to eat. On the second day the horse seemed to regain its spirit and so he rode it slowly. At first the horse struggled along and limped, when wasn't losing its footing it would stumble, but the further it walked the better it got. After seven or eight days of having enough to eat, it regained its strength; its steps as light as if it were flying. Yang Guo couldn't speak his delight and took even more care of it.

One day Yang Guo was in an outdoor restaurant awaiting an order when the horse walked over to a table and kept neighing at a bowl of wine on the table, as if he wanted to drink the wine. Yang Guo was curious and ordered a large bowl of wine and placed it on the table, and then stroked the horse's head. The horse drank it all in one go; its tail raised its legs stepped, it was feeling very pleased. Yang Guo felt that this was interesting and called some more wine; the horse drank over ten bowls one after the other, and wasn't finished. Yang Guo wanted to call for more wine but the waiter saw he was dressed in ragged garments and afraid that he had no money to pay so said that they didn't have any more wine. Afterwards he got on the horse. The horse was under the influence of the wine and took large steps, galloping like crazy; the trees by the side of the road receded, it was extremely fast. When a normal spirited horse galloped, it would gallop steadily. Though this horse was fast, its body would be high and then low, jolting about very uncoordinated, if it weren't for the fact that Yang Guo possessed excellent lightness kung fu, he would not have been able to ride it. The horse also had another strange characteristic, whenever there was another animal on the road, it would speed up and overtake it, no matter if it was a cow, horse, pony or donkey, it would gallop past them

before slowing. This proud and competitive air seems to have come about because of the suffering it has had in its life.

Yang Guo thought that this thousand-mile colt has been trapped in the hands of the villager, wasting half its life; now that its spirit is free, it wants to gallop and fly over the lands. This behavior was similar to Yang Guo's; the man and horse were like good friends. He was bored sometimes and would play with the horse, in a few days he was happy again. He has been heading south and had arrived at the banks of Han Shui. As he rode the horse he thought about how he teased Lu Wushuang and tricked the Li Mochou Master and disciple team, he couldn't stop laughing. He then remembered he didn't know where Xiao Longnu was or when they were going to meet again, he became sad and despondent.

That day he traveled until noon and on the road he kept on seeing beggars. From their appearances, most of them knew kung fu, he thought, "Could it be that the matter between Wifey and the beggars hasn't finished yet? Or could it be that the Beggar Clan has summoned all these people to fight with Li Mochou? I must take a look." He didn't like the Beggar Clan much, but because he admired Hong Qigong, he couldn't stop himself from feeling close to the Beggar Clan. He thought as long as the beggars don't trouble Lu Wushuang he will give them the news that Hong Qigong had passed away. He carried on for a while and saw the road was filling up with more and more beggars. When the beggars saw Yang Guo they were surprised, there was no difference in the way they were dressed but if there wasn't an urgent matter, members of the clan would not travel by horseback. Yang Guo ignored them and slowly carried on.

He continued until afternoon when suddenly he heard the cries of eagles in the air; two white eagles flew past, and descended ahead of him. He heard a beggar say, "Chief Huang is here, there's probably going to be an assembly tonight."

Another beggar said, "Will Hero Guo come?"

The first beggar replied, "The two are never apart." he saw Yang Guo reign in his horse listening to their words; he gave him a glance and closed his mouth.

When Yang Guo heard the names Guo Jing and Huang Rong he was slightly alarmed, and then in his heart laughed coldly. "Earlier I lived in your home, ate your food and you made a fool out of me; then I was young and useless and I suffered a lot. Right now I'm relying on the world, who needs your support?" He had another thought, "Why don't I pretend I have nowhere to go and have come to them for help and then see how they treat me."

He then found a quiet place and messed up his hair. Then he punched himself in the left eye, he scratched his cheek a few times; there was now a blue green bruise on his left eye and there were some red marks on his face. His clothes were already torn and old but he tore them even more making them look even more ragged. He rolled in the mud and dust a few times and then got up on the horse that was covered in scars and skin ulcers. Indeed, he now looked like he was a person with nowhere to go and on his last legs. As soon as he finished he limped back to the main road, he didn't ride on the horse and walked amongst the beggars. He didn't lead the horse along, the horse just followed on its own. Someone from the Beggar Clan asked whether he was on his way to attend the great feast, Yang Guo stared and didn't reply and slipped back into the crowd, walking back and forth. The group of people wound along the road and

eventually came up to a large, old and ruined temple. He saw the two white eagles roosting on top of a pine tree in front of the temple.

One of the Wu brothers was holding a dish, while the other took a slab of meat from the dish and flung it towards the eagles. Yang Guo had seen the two before when they teamed up with Guo Fu to fight Li Mochou, but at that time he was too busy thinking about Guo Fu. He didn't take the two to mind, but now he took a closer look at the two. He saw Wu Dunru looked intense, he was concentrating one hundred percent, on the other hand Wu Xiuwen was active and lively; he ran to east and darted to the west, not taking a moment's respite. Wu Dunru was wearing a purple coloured Chong silk gown, Wu Xiuwen was wearing a large blue coloured Shandong silk gown, and around their waists were tied an embroidered satin 'hero' sash. They were indeed young heroes, standing out from the crowd. Yang Guo went up to them and made a bow, and stammered, "Greetings... greetings brothers Wu, I hope you've been... been well."

At this time there were beggars everywhere around the temple, all their clothes were ragged, so although Yang Guo was covered in dirt, he did not look out of place in the crowd of beggars. Wu Dunru returned the favour and glanced up and down at Yang Guo, he couldn't recognize him and said, "Forgive my inexperienced eyes, what is brother's name?"

Yang Guo said, "There is no need to worry about such a lowly name, little brother... little brother wants to meet with Chief Huang."

Wu Dunru thought his voice sounded slightly familiar, he was about to question him when a voice like a silver bell

came from the entrance of the temple, "Big brother Wu, I asked you to buy me a soft horse whip, have you bought it?"

Wu Dunru quickly moved Yang Guo aside and walked forward saying, "I bought it ages ago, give it a test, does it feel right?" He fished out a horse whip from his pocket as he said this.

Yang Guo turned his head and saw a girl in a light green dress hurrying from the temple's doors; her brows were curved, her little nose slightly raised, her face like white jade, her smile like a flower, it was Guo Fu. The adornments in her hair weren't extravagant, only a pearl was worn in her hair, the light make her look as if she was adorned with jade gem make up. Yang Guo only gave her a glance but he couldn't stop himself from having a feeling of inferiority; he turned his head and didn't look back. Wu Xiuwen also dashed forward and the two brothers spent all their effort talking to her. After speaking with Guo Fu for a while, Wu Dunru remembered Yang Guo and turned around saying, "You've come because of the 'Heroes Feast'?"

Yang Guo did not know what the 'Heroes Feast' was and just answered agreeably. Wu Dunru summoned one of the beggars with his hand and said, "Take care of this friend, tomorrow take him to Da Xingguan." After he said this he turned his attention back to Guo Fu and ignored him. The beggar agreed and after greeting each other, asked for his name. Yang Guo told him truthfully. He was a nobody. Of course the beggar won't have heard of his name before and wouldn't think anything of it. The beggar called himself Wang Shisan; he was a second band Beggar Clan member. He asked, "Where has brother Yang come from?"

Yang Guo said, "From Xiayi."

Wang Shisan said, "Ah, Brother Yang is from Quanzhen sect?"

As soon as he heard the words 'Quanzhen sect' Yang Guo's head ached, he shook his head and said, "No."

Wang Shisan, "Brother Yang you've got the 'Heroes' invitation with you?"

Yang Guo was startled and said, "I've just wandered around Jianghu, how can I call myself a hero? I have met your clan's chief Huang once before, I only want to see her and ask for some money to return to my home."

Wang Shisan's eyebrows wrinkled and he thought for a while and then said, "Chief Huang is receiving the heroes at the moment, I'm afraid that she won't have time to see you." Yang Guo had deliberately made himself such a sorry sight, the lower the regard the other person had for him, the prouder he'll get, he made himself more pitiful and pleaded earnestly.

The members of the Beggar Clan are all people from poor environments, they have always helped those in need and distress; they would never look down on other poor people. Wang Shisan heard him speak with such grief and woe, and so said, "Little brother Yang, have a meal first, tomorrow we'll go to Da Xingguan together. I'm your big brother, I'll go and tell the elders, who in turn will inform our chief. We'll wait and see what orders she gives, how about that?"

Wang Shisan had called him brother Yang, but now he heard that he wasn't one of the guests for the 'heroes' feast. He was a fair few years older than him so he changed his greeting to little brother Yang. Yang Guo thanked him repeatedly. Wang Shisan invited him into the derelict temple and bought out some rice and dishes for the guest. One of the rules of the Beggar Clan is when a Beggar Clan

member arrives to celebrate a ceremony, they'll first need to get chicken, fish, beef and lamb and leave it until it starts to rot, and gets like a soup of spoiled meat. The meaning was that they shouldn't forget their origins; but when treating guests, proper wine and dishes are bought out.

As Yang Guo was eating, a flash of light shone in his eyes, he saw Guo Fu enter the hall, her face with a smile, the Wu Brothers followed behind on her left and right. He heard Wu Xiuwen say, "Fine, we'll leave tonight and travel through the night to rush to Da Xingguan. I'll go and get your red horse." The three of them were too busy talking to notice Yang Guo who was sitting on the floor eating. The three of them went to the back garden to get their bags and weapons and exited the temple. Many hoof beats could be heard as the horses galloped away. Yang Guo planted his chopsticks into his bowl, and heard the hoof beats of the horses become distant; a hundred emotions went through his mind, but was it worry or hate, anger or sorrow?

The next day, Wang Shisan looked after him as they went back to the road. On the road, apart from the crowds of Beggar Clan members, there were many eminent names of Wulin, some traveled by horseback, some traveled on foot, all heading for the 'Heroes Feast'. Yang Guo didn't know what the 'Heroes Feast' was or what the 'Heroes' invitation was about; he knew that Wang Shisan wouldn't dare to reveal it to him so he pretended to be stupid and miserable. They arrived at Da Xingguan at around seven o'clock that night. Da Xingguan is an important strategic point in the Henan province, the topography of the area was divine yet there weren't many towns and cities around. This was because the Mongolian soldiers were situated north of here. Wang Shisan led Yang Guo past a town and traveled for another seven or eight miles. In front of them were hundred of Japanese Scholar trees surrounding a large

manor; all the heroes were heading for this manor. Building followed building inside the manor, all folding over each other and it was hard to see how many rooms there really were; but it appeared that the manor could easily hold thousands of guests and have room to spare.

Wang Shisan was just a lowly member of the Beggar Clan, he knew that their Chief was occupied right now; how could he go disturb her over such a trivial matter such as borrowing traveling money? He arranged quarters for Yang Guo and then went away with his friends.

Yang Guo saw that this was a very grand manor, there were many servants busy with serving the guests; he was curious and wondered who the master of the manor was and how come they had so much respect? He suddenly heard the three blasts from a trumpet and a musical ensemble started their music. Someone said, "The master and mistress of the manor are meeting the guests now, let's go take a look and see who the hero is that just arrived?" He saw the guest and servant move to one side. The crowd of guests also stood to either side of the hall.

A man and a woman entered the hall shoulder to shoulder, they were both around forty years of age. The male wore an embroidered gown, he had a slight moustache, exuding an air of authority and prosperity; the woman had white skin, she was courteous and gracious like an affluent mistress. The guests quietly discussed amongst themselves, "Master Lu and Mistress Lu are greeting this important guest personally."

Behind them was another couple, when Yang Guo saw them his heart trembled, he became flustered; it was Guo Jing and Huang Rong. He hadn't seen them for many years, Guo Jing seems to be more serious, there was a slight smile of Huang Rong's face; her beauty had not diminished slightly.

Yang Guo thought, "So Auntie Guo is this beautiful, I never noticed it when I was younger."

Guo Jing wore a coarse long gown, Huang Rong was wearing a light purple silk gown, but because she was the Chief of the Beggar Clan, she could only tie the gown with pins in the places where it doesn't catch the eye and that was it. Behind Guo Jing and Huang Rong followed Guo Fu and the Wu brothers. Right then, the hall was lit up with countless red candles, under the candle light the crowd could see that the males were noble and the girl was lovable and glamorous.

The crowd pointed, "That is hero Guo, and that is Madam Huang, Chief Huang."

"Who's that girl who's cute as a flower?"

"It is the Guo couple's daughter."

"Are those young men their sons?"

"No, they're their disciples."

Yang Guo didn't want to meet the Guo couple in the crowd so he hid behind a tall man and watched; four Taoists appeared from the direction of the music. When Yang Guo saw them, he couldn't refrain from feeling angry. The first one that entered was an old Taoist with a head of white hair, his face was purple, it was the Blithe Elder Hao Datong; behind him was a grey haired old Taoist priestess, Yang Guo has never seen her before. Behind them entered two middle-aged Taoists standing shoulder to shoulder, one was Yin Zhiping, and the other was Zhao Zhijing. Master and Mistress Lu greeted them; they greeted the old Taoist priestess Master; they received the Guo couple, Guo Fu and the Wu brothers and led them forward.

Yang Guo heard from the crowd, "That old Taoist priestess is Quanzhen's sword heroine; her name is Sun Bu'Er."

"Ah, she's the Sage of Tranquility, famous throughout the northern and southern sides of the Changjian River."

"Yes. She is Mistress Lu's master. However, Master Lu's kung fu was not taught by her."

Master Lu's first names are Guanying, his father Lu Chengfeng was a disciple of Huang Rong's father Huang Yaoshi, and so, they could be regarded a generation lower than Guo Jing and Huang Rong. Lu Guanying's wife Cheng Yaojia is Sun Bu'Er's disciple. The couple originally resided in Lake Tai's Returning Echo Manor. The manor was burned down by Ouyang Feng. Lu Chengfeng was furious and influenced by his anger, he told his son that he didn't want to be on the minds of Lake Tai's bandits again; so he took his family north and resided in Da Xingguan. Lu Chengfeng had now passed away. Years ago, Cheng Yaojia was in trouble, she was rescued by Guo Jing, Huang Rong and the Beggar Clan; she had always remembered this. When the Beggar Clan sent out the 'Heroes' invitation, the Lu couple took on the task themselves and arranged the 'Heroes Feast' here at their manor.

Guo Jing waited for the greetings to be over and led Hao Datong and Sun Bu'Er towards the hall to meet the gathering of heroes. Hao Datong stroked his beard as he said, "When Ma, Qiu, Liu and Wang received Chief Huang's invitation, they wanted to come here in person but apprentice brother Ma has not been feeling well, apprentice brother Liu and the others are helping him to recuperate and can't leave him, they can only apologize to Chief Huang."

Huang Rong said, "Well said, well said. Those seniors are too polite."

Though she was young, she was the leader of the world's greatest clan, Hao Datong and the others treated her with great respect. Guo Jing and Yin Zhiping knew each other when they were young and had met when Qiu Chuji took Yin Zhiping and 18 or 20 others to meet Genghis Khan. When they saw each other both of them were delighted; the two of them entered together. Guo Jing asked about Ma Yu's illness and missed him very much. The main hall was arranged for the feast, the noise of people and the reflection of the red candles created a great atmosphere.

Yin Zhiping looked to the east and then west, it was as if he was searching for someone in the crowd of people.

Zhao Zhijing chuckled and quietly said, "Apprentice brother Yin; will the one named Long make an appearance here?" Yin Zhiping's face became red and didn't reply.

Guo Jing did not know they were talking about Xiao Longnu and interrupted, "There's a hero named Long? Are they your friend?"

Zhao Zhijing said, "It's apprentice brother Yin's friend, I dare not to make such a friend." Guo Jing saw they looked strange; there was something else going on and he didn't inquire any further.

Suddenly, Yin Zhiping spotted Yang Guo in the crowd; his whole body trembled like he was struck by lightning. He knew that if he's here, Xiao Longnu would also be here. Zhao Zhijing followed his gaze and his face suddenly changed, he angrily shouted, "Yang Guo! It's Yang Guo! That ... That Xiao Longnu is here as well!"

When Guo Jing heard the two words 'Yang Guo' he immediately turned around. The two haven't seen each other for years; Yang Guo has now grown up, Guo Jing would have not been able to recognize him straight away. But when he heard Zhao Zhijing's shout, he immediately recognized who he was. He was shocked and delighted, he dashed over and took his hand and said with joy, "Guo'er, you're here as well? I was afraid that I was going to disturb your training so I did not request your presence. It's great that your master has bought you here."

Everyone in Quanzhen was ashamed about the incident of Yang Guo expelling himself from Chongyang Palace; no one had leaked a word about this to outsiders. Guo Jing did not know about it; at the time he was on Peach Blossom Island. The reason that Zhao Zhijing came to the 'Heroes Feast' was to tell Guo Jing about this event, he couldn't predict that he would encounter Yang Guo here. He was afraid that he had heard Yang Guo's account of the events and would take his side, but judging from his reaction he knew that the two had just met again. His face became clear and faced the sky saying, "How could this Taoist dream of being Master Yang's Master?"

Guo Jing was shocked and asked, "Why does brother Zhao say this? The child does not listen to your teachings?"

Zhao Zhijing saw that the hall was filled with heroes, if he talked about this he would definitely get into an argument with Yang Guo. Quanzhen sect would lose face; he just chuckled coldly and didn't say a word. Guo Jing was worried about Yang Guo, he saw his eye was bruised and nose blue, his garments were torn and ragged, his body covered in mud. It showed that he had suffered a lot and he held him to his chest. As soon as Yang Guo was held, he secretly circulated his chi to protect his body from harm. This hug was out of love, why would Guo Jing have any intentions to

harm him? He called out to Huang Rong, "Rong' Er, look who's here."

When Huang Rong saw Yang Guo she was shocked. She did not feel Guo Jing's delight and calmly said, "Great, you're here as well."

Yang Guo lightly struggled free and said, "My body is filthy, there is no need to dirty your clothes." His sentence was said coldly and he had a scornful tone in his voice. Guo Jing felt slightly sad and thought, "This child doesn't have a father or mother; it looks like even his Master doesn't care for him." He held his hand, wanting him to sit at the same table as he. Yang Guo arranged to sit in the corner table. He didn't want to sit with such people and said coldly, "I'll sit over there. Uncle Guo, take care of your important guests." Guo Jing felt that since there were many guests here, it wasn't convenient to leave the guests alone so he lightly patted his shoulder and made a toast at the main guest's table.

After three rounds of wine, Huang Rong stood up and said clearly, "Tomorrow is the day for the 'Heroes Feast'. There are still many heroes and good men who have yet to arrive. Tonight I ask you to enjoy your appetite and don't stop drinking until you are drunk; we'll talk about the serious matters tomorrow."

Meat piled up like mountains on the tables, wine flowed like rivers; the guests either played drinking games or told stories. That day, the amount of pigs and sheep that were prepared and the amount of wine that was poured in the Lu manor were beyond measure.

After the meal, the servants led the guests to their rooms to rest. Zhao Zhijing said a few quiet words to Hao Datong, Hao Datong nodded. Zhao Zhijing stood up and saluted with

his hands towards Guo Jing and said, "Hero Guo, the Taoist has a heavy burden to reveal. It is extremely shameful, and today I have come to apologize because of this."

Guo Jing quickly returned the greeting and said, "You are too modest apprentice brother Zhao. We'll go and speak in the study. Whatever the child has done to offend apprentice brother Zhao, I will heavily punish him to ease apprentice brother Zhao's anger." He said these words clearly, though Yang Guo was a couple of tables away, Yang Guo heard it and decided, "If he shouts at me just once, I will get up and leave and never see him again. Though my kung fu cannot compare to his, if he beats me I will fight him with my life." Once he made this decision he felt slightly more comfortable, he wasn't as fearful as he was when he first saw Zhao Zhijing. He saw Guo Jing signaling to him with his hand and went over to him and followed behind him.

Guo Fu and the Wu brothers were drinking wine at another table, she didn't know who Yang Guo was, but after being told the news by Guo Jing and Huang Rong, she remembered that it was the boy who they played with when they were younger on Peach Blossom Island. They had been separated for a long time; young people change their appearances the most, and after a few months great changes can be seen, let alone a few years. The fact that Yang Guo had made himself look in such a sorry state, and then hiding himself in the crowd, of course Guo Fu would not know who he was.

When she saw Yang Guo had returned, she couldn't help herself from thinking: she remembered how they had a little argument when they were small on the island, would he still be angry at this event? She saw him in such a weary state, compared with the graceful and the distinguished look of the Wu brothers; they were poles apart. She couldn't help but feel some pity for him and said to the Wu

Dunru, "Father sent him to Quanzhen to learn martial arts; I wonder how his skills are compared to ours?"

Before Wu Dunru could reply, Wu Xiuwen interrupted, "Master's skills are unequalled; how could he compete with us?"

Guo Fu nodded, "His foundation was bad before, it would be difficult for him to make any progress, how did he end up in such a state?"

Wu Xiuwen said, "Those old Taoists stared at him as if they wanted to swallow him whole. That kid has such a bad temper; he must have caused a major incident."

The three of them talked quietly for a while, and then they heard Guo Jing inviting Hao Datong and the others to the study. He said he was going to punish Yang Guo heavily; she was curious and said, "Quick, we'll go and hide ourselves in the study first and listen to what they are talking about."

Wu Dunru was worried about being punished by their master if they found out and didn't reply. Wu Xiuwen agreed and went ahead. Guo Fu's right leg stopped; a slightly angry expression came across her face and she said to Wu Dunru, "Don't listen to me then."

Wu Du Run saw her face showed signs of anger but her brows, eyes and smile were still exuding their beauty, his heart jumped and he couldn't disobey and followed her quickly. As soon as they hid behind the bookshelf, Guo Jing and Huang Rong led Hao Datong and the others to the study, and they sat down. Yang Guo followed and stood to one side.

Guo Jing said, "Guo'er, just sit!"

Yang Guo shook his head and said, "I won't sit." Even in the presence of six great fighters of the Wulin world he was still bold, but he couldn't help but feel a little bit restless.

Guo Jing had always treated Yang Guo as his own son, he was also extremely respectful of the Quanzhen seven masters. He thought that it wasn't necessary to ask about the rights and wrongs of what happened; it must be the junior's fault, he put on a face and said to Yang Guo, "You are very bold, how dare you not greet your master. Quick, kowtow to your Martial Grandmasters, your Master and your Martial Uncle to apologize."

The relationship between an emperor and his subjects, a father and son, a master and disciple were all very significant. When a subject is called upon by an emperor to die, they dare not stay alive; if the father wants the son to perish, the son must do so; the same can be said for the Wulin relationship between Master and disciple, a hint of disobedience is not allowed. Guo Jing reprimanded him this way because he pitied him for the suffering he has had alone, his tone was very gentle and soft. Had it been someone else, he would have shouted 'bastard, animal' long ago, and struck him with his fists on the head and face.

Zhao Zhijing stood up and chuckled, "How can I be Master Yang's Master? Hero Guo, there is no need for you to ridicule me. Our Quanzhen sect has done nothing to offend hero Guo, why is it necessary to insult me in public? Master Yang, this little Taoist will kowtow to apologize to the Senior; it was my fault for being blind, I didn't recognize such a hero and good man."

The Guo couple saw that his expression had changed completely, the more he said the angrier he became, both of them were shocked. If a disciple did something wrong, the Master punishing them would be normal, why is it

necessary for such a reaction? Huang Rong knew that whatever Yang Guo did, it was very serious. After this bout of anger by Zhao Zhijing, Guo Jing couldn't speak so she slowly said, "I am extremely sorry for giving apprentice brother Zhao such trouble. Please don't get angry apprentice brother Zhao, sit down and discuss what the child has done to offend his Master."

Zhao Zhijing said loudly, "How can I, Zhao Zhijing dare to be someone's Master with my lowly skills? Won't that just make the heroes and good men of the world laugh their heads off? How does that make me look?"

Huang Rong's eyebrows wrinkled, she was resentful. She and the Quanzhen sect weren't the greatest of friends; years ago they used the "Big Dipper Formation" against her father. Qiu Chuji also tried to arrange for Mu Nianci to be Guo Jing's bride; though these events happened long ago, the animosity had disappeared; but this outburst by Zhao Zhijing in front of her may have been a bit too impolite. Though both Hao Datong and Sun Bu'Er felt that it was hard to blame Zhao Zhijing for getting so angry, but the way he was acting was not how a Taoist should act.

Sun Bu'Er said, "Zhao Zhijing, explain everything to hero Guo and Chief Huang. Look at the way you're acting and think how it looks! We are Taoists, what kind of Taoism have we been studying?" Though Sun Bu'Er was a woman, she was very stern, her juniors all feared her; when Zhao Zhijing heard her speak slowly he didn't dare to make any more outbursts and said, "Yes, yes." He returned to his seat.

Guo Jing said, "Guo'er, look how your Master treats his Seniors with such respect, why don't you follow his example."

Zhao Zhijing wanted to say, "I'm not his Master", but he took a look at Sun Bu'Er and managed to restrain himself. But who knew that Yang Guo would say loudly, "He's not my Master!" When he said this, Guo Jing and Huang Rong were both extremely shocked; Guo Fu and the Wu brothers who were hiding behind the bookshelf were also extremely surprised. The master disciple relationship was very significant in the world of Wulin, there's a saying, "A Master for one day, a Father for life."

Guo Jing was brought up the Jiangnan Seven Freaks and was taught martial arts by Hong Qigong; he was very grateful to his Masters. Ever since he was young he believed that the ways of his Masters were right and proper. How would he know that Yang Guo would dismiss his Master in public, and say such treasonous and heretical things? He got up and pointed at Yang Guo; his voice trembled as he said, "What...what... what did you say?" He wouldn't scold anyone but his face went green, he was very angry. Huang Rong had very rarely seen him get so angry; she whispered to him, "Brother Jing, that child has always been bad; there is no need to get angry over him."

Yang Guo was actually afraid but when he saw his loving Uncle Guo change his face to such an angry expression, he made a decision and thought, "Nothing is greater than death, and the worst that will happen is that you people will kill me." So he said clearly, "My character has always been bad, but I have never begged you to teach me martial arts. You two are eminent people of the Wulin world, why was it necessary for you to use such a crafty plan to harm a child who doesn't have a mother or father?" When he said 'who doesn't have a mother or father', he pitied himself, his eyes became slightly red but he bit down on his lips and thought, "Even I die today, I won't shed a single tear."

Guo Jing angrily said, "Your Auntie Guo and Master taught you martial arts sincerely because of the friendship between me and your deceased father, who... who used a crafty plan? Who...who wants to harm you?" He wasn't the most articulate; he stuttered even more now that he is angry.

Yang Guo saw how impatient he was and spoke even slower, "Uncle Guo has treated me very well, I will never forget this."

Huang Rong slowly said, "Auntie Guo has wronged you; if you want to remember this for the rest of your life that's up to you."

At this stage, he might as well boldly go on, he said, "Auntie Guo has not treated me badly, nor has she wronged me. You said you were going to teach me martial arts, in reality, you taught me to study. You didn't teach me an ounce of kung fu. Studying is a good thing; this nephew has learned a few more words and heard you speak about the stories of the past. But those old Taoists" He pointed to Hao Datong and Zhao Zhijing and said furiously, "There will be a day when I will take my revenge."

Guo Jing was shocked and quickly asked, "Whaa...What? What revenge... what happened?"

Yang Guo said, "The one named Zhao calls himself my Master, he didn't teach me any martial arts, fine, but he ordered many young Taoists to beat me up. Auntie Guo didn't teach me martial arts and the Quanzhen sect didn't teach me martial arts, I could only take the beatings. The one named Hao saw that there was a Grandma that loved me, and he killed her. The rotten Taoist named Hao, speak, isn't this the truth?" When he remembered how Grandma

Sun died for him, he ground his teeth and wanted to leap over to Hao Datong and kill him.

Hao Datong was an eminent Taoist of Quanzhen, he had learned martial arts, and he had reached a deep level in both areas. He accidentally killed Grandma Sun and in all these years he hadn't had a moment's peace. This was the most hateful thing he had done in his life. The Seven Masters of Quanzhen had killed countless people in their lives, but all the people they had killed were scoundrels, traitors and crooks; they had never harmed an innocent. Now, he heard Yang Guo blaming him in front of everyone, he couldn't stop his face from turning grey. The events of that day when he made Grandma Sun throw up blood with his palm flashed in front of his eyes. He didn't have a weapon so he stretched out his left hand and took a long sword from Zhao Zhijing's waist.

Everyone thought that he wanted to stab Yang Guo with the sword, Guo Jing took a step forward to protect Yang Guo but who could have known that he would turn the long sword around with the handle facing Yang Guo and say, "Correct. I killed the wrong person. Take revenge for Grandma Sun, I won't retaliate."

When everyone saw him do this, they were surprised. Guo Jing was afraid that Yang Guo would take the sword and harm him so he called out, "Guo'er, don't be impolite."

Yang Guo knew that he wouldn't be able to avenge Grandma Sun in front of Guo Jing and Huang Rong; he said coldly, "You know that Uncle Guo won't let me attack, so why are you pretending to be so gracious? If you really want me to kill you, then why don't you hand me over the sword in a place where there isn't anyone about?"

Hao Datong was a Senior of Wulin, he was made speechless by the words of this young man. He couldn't hand over the long sword or take it back; he circulated his chi through his hands and forced the sword to snap in half. He flung the sword on the floor and gave a long sigh, he said, "It's finished, it's finished!" He exited the study. Guo Jing wanted to persuade him to remain behind but his head did not turn back.

Guo Jing looked at Yang Guo and then at Sun Bu'Er and the others, he thought that from what had happened, the child has not lied. He thought for a while and said, "Why didn't Quanzhen teach you any martial arts? What have you been doing for the past few years?" As he said this, his words had slowed down a lot more.

Yang Guo said, "When Uncle Guo went up Mount Zhongnan, he defeated hundreds of Taoist without reply, even if Ma, Qiu, Liu, Wang and the others didn't mind, would the others just forget about it? They couldn't do anything to Uncle Guo but could it be that they wouldn't vent their anger on a child like me? They wished they could kill me; why would they teach me martial arts? These few years I have experienced days where there was no light, the fact that today I have the chance to see Uncle Guo again is all down to heaven opening its eyes." Those words did not mention the fact that he expelled himself from Quanzhen and pushed all the blame on Guo Jing. He said he had endured 'days where there was no light', this wasn't a lie exactly, when he was living in the tomb, he didn't see much light or day. When Guo Jing heard these words, he couldn't stop his pity and compassion from rising.

Zhao Zhijing saw that Guo Jing more or less believed him and became anxious, he said, "You... you bastard talking such crap, the name of Quanzhen has been tarnished by... by"

Guo Jing believed that what Yang Guo said was the truth. Huang Rong's face was not moved, she saw Yang Guo's eyes sparkled and he had a clever expression on his face; she thought, "This child is extremely crafty, there must be a lie somewhere." She said, "From what you said, you don't know any martial arts? All these years in Quanzhen were wasted?" As she asked these questions she slowly got up, she suddenly stretched out her left hand and sent put a palm towards the crown of his head. The fingers of the palm was aiming for the head's 'Hundred Meetings' pressure point, the base of the palm was heading for the 'Rising Star' pressure point that was an inch from the hairline, these two main pressure points were fatal. If there was a heavy blow to these places the person would die, there would be no saving them.

Guo Jing was shocked and he called out; "Rong'er!" But Huang Rong was extremely fast, this palm was her family's "Descending Brave Divine Sword Palm", there was no warning, as soon as the hand moved the palm arrived; if Guo Jing wanted to save him, it was too late.

Yang Guo moved back slightly and wanted to avoid it, but with Huang Rong's kung fu, now that she had attacked, just how would he dodge it; he saw the palm going towards his head. Yang Guo was shocked, he quickly stretched out his arm to react but his mind had a quick thought, his right arm moved slightly and then hung down. Someone such as Guo Jing who was greatly skilled but slow in thought would not understand what was happening; they would quickly repel this attack. But Yang Guo was extremely quick, he immediately understood, "Auntie Guo is trying to test my kung fu, if I avoid this palm, then it will show that I've been lying." He saw Huang Rong's attack was fatal, if she wasn't testing out his kung fu and he himself didn't react, wouldn't that mean he will have lost his life in vain? In a flash he

fired up his stubborn nature and thought, "Fine, if I die then I die!" Though his kung fu may not be as good as Huang Rong's, if he wanted to stretch out his hand and repel her palm, it wouldn't be hard, but now he risked his life and didn't move his arms.

Indeed Huang Rong was testing his kung fu with this stance, as soon as the palm reached his head she didn't increase her strength, she saw a frightened and shocked expression on his face. He didn't stretch out his hand to repel this attack and he didn't secretly circulate his chi to protect his vital pressure points, showing he didn't know an ounce of martial arts. She smiled and said, "I didn't teach you kung fu because I wanted what was best for you. It looks like the Taoists of Quanzhen had the same thought as me." She returned to her seat and quietly said to Guo Jing, "He really hasn't learned any of the Quanzhen's martial arts." As soon as she said this, her mind secretly called out, "Ai yo, something's wrong! I almost fell for his lie." She remembered how when he was little he used the "Toad Stance" to attack Wu Dunru; he had some kung fu foundation. Even if he hasn't made an inch of progress but knew she was about to strike with her palm, he would definitely block the attack. She thought, "Young man, young man, you're too clever, if you scrambled and waved your hands in a frantic state to block my attack, I might have believed your lie. But there is one point that doesn't make sense in your charade, you've left a flaw." She didn't reveal this and thought that she would watch him and see what other schemes he'll come up with. She looked at Zhao Zhijing and then at Yang Guo, and she just smiled slightly.

Zhao Zhijing saw Huang Rong test out a stance on Yang Guo who didn't fight back, he knew that Yang Guo had managed to conceal his kung fu from her, displaying even more signs that he was in the wrong. His anger erupted

and said loudly, "That bastard is very crafty; if Chief Huang couldn't find anything then let me try." He went over to Yang Guo and pointed to his nose and said, "Little bastard, you really don't know any martial arts? If you don't defend, I will not hold back, if you want to live or die, it's up to you." He knew that Yang Guo's kung fu was above his, but under his fatal attacks, there would be no other option for him but to reveal the truth. If he still kept up this charade, he might as well take his life. The worst that would happen is he will lose the Guo's couple's friendship and be heavily punished by his sect's leader. Fury filled his chest, hate filled his guts, he thought, "You knew that Chief Huang wouldn't harm your life that's why you were so bold; you acted very well. Let's see if you still have the guts to keep up the charade?" His sleeve waved, he was about to attack.

Guo Jing called out, "Please wait!" He was afraid that he would harm Yang Guo's life and wanted to intervene.

Huang Rong tugged his sleeve and quietly said, "Don't do anything." She knew that Zhao Zhijing was extremely angry, his attacks would not be light, and Yang Guo had no way to avoid his attacks by mere luck. When he defends, the truth will come out. How would Guo Jing know that there are so many other things going on here; he was worried but knew that his wife's plans had never failed before. He didn't say anything else and just took one step forward, if there was a real danger he would still be able to make a rescue.

Zhao Zhijing said to Sun Bu'Er and Yin Zhiping, "Martial Uncle Sun, apprentice brother Yin, that bastard is pretending that he doesn't know martial arts, I am forced with no other option but to test him myself. If he keeps it up to the end and I kill him, please be a witness for me in front of our leader, Martial Uncle Qiu and my Master."

Sun Bu'Er knew what had happened with the incident of Yang Guo expelling himself from the Quanzhen sect. She saw him using his wits and craft to make sure Zhao Zhijing could not back down and make sure it was Quanzhen sect who was in the wrong. She hoped Zhao Zhijing would force him to use his martial arts and chuckled, "That disobedient disciple and traitor to our Quanzhen sect. Killing him wouldn't be anything serious." She is an eminent Taoist, how could she tell someone to kill? Those words were actually meant to scare Yang Guo, wanting him to stop pretending.

Zhao Zhijing had his Martial Uncle's support and was even more daring; he raised his right foot and aimed for Yang Guo's abdomen. The stance "Flying Past Heaven's Mountains" had softness within its hardness; in the yang there was yin, it was a really lethal stance. Though this kick was very powerful, it wasn't very profound; it was a stance that is taught when one first enters the Quanzhen sect. It was a very ordinary stance when it is used, and as long as someone knows a little kung fu, they would be able to neutralize it. On the first day of practicing martial arts, the disciples of Quanzhen would first learn the stance of "Flying Past Heaven's Mountains" and then "Force of the Retreating Horse"; this was the stance to avoid the stance of "Flying Past Heaven's Mountains". One attack one defense, this was the most basic set of kung fu. By using this stance, he wanted Guo Jing and Huang Rong to understand one thing, "Even if I did not teach him advanced martial arts, could it be that I didn't even teach him the basic kung fu of our sect's very first lesson?"

When Yang Guo saw the kick come, he did not use the "Force of the Retreating Horse"; his left hand hung down protecting his abdomen. Zhao Zhijing saw that he was so bold that he didn't even move or dodge, he didn't hold back

on his kick and kicked straight across, when the tip of his foot was about three inches away from Yang Guo's abdomen, he saw in the moonlight Yang Guo's left thumb slightly sticking out, aiming for his right foot's ankle 'Large Opening' pressure point. If he kicked out with power, before the tip of the foot had reached the abdomen, his pressure point will be sealed first; the opponent wouldn't actually seal the pressure point themselves. As the foot strikes his finger, it will be struck on the pressure point, sealing it in the process.

He was the best fighter of Quanzhen's third generation; in the midst of danger he quickly changed his stance, he turned and changed the direction of the kick, his right leg passing Yang Guo's side. At least he was able to avoid the trap but his body was off balance, and his face turned red.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong were behind Yang Guo and didn't see his thumb, they thought it was because Zhao Zhijing was holding back, at the very last second he changed his stance. But Sun Bu'Er and Yin Zhiping could see this clearly. Yin Zhiping didn't say a word.

Sun Bu'Er stood up and shouted, "Little punk, very crafty!"

Zhao Zhijing's left palm hung in the air, his right palm aimed to chop across Yang Guo's left cheek; this stance of "Purple Lightning Striking through Words" was a refined stance of advanced martial arts. As the palm arrives halfway, the direction suddenly changes, originally aimed to the left cheek it now was aiming to chop down on his neck on the right side. How could he know that Yang Guo has learned the "Jade Heart Manual" to a very fluent state, the manual was the Black Star of Quanzhen's kung fu. Every lethal fist techniques and palm stances that Wang Chongyang invented were all defeated ingeniously by Lin Chaoying years ago. When Yang Guo saw his left palm

hanging in the air, he quickly covered his head with his arms as if he was scared, his left index finger hid itself by his neck on the right side but because he covered it with his right palm, Zhao Zhijing had no way to see it. As soon as the palm arrives, Yang Guo's right hand slanted slightly, a 'bo' sound was heard as the finger sealed the 'Back Stream' pressure point on Zhao Zhijing's palm.

Once again, it was Zhao Zhijing himself who forced his own pressure point to be sealed by hitting it on his finger; Yang Guo knew what the opponent would do and prepared his finger in place. Once Zhao Zhijing's pressure point on his palm was sealed, his arm immediately went numb; he knew he had fallen into his trap. He was furious and his left leg came sweeping out.

Yang Guo called out, "Oh no!" He bent his left arm and placed his elbow two and a half inches above his waist. When Zhao Zhijing's left leg came, the elbow struck his ankle's 'Reflecting Sea' and 'Great River' pressure points. This kick came out of fury; it was kicked with great strength. The pressure points were severely struck, his left leg went numb and he kneeled down on the floor.

Sun Bu'Er saw that her martial nephew was being embarrassed, she stretched out her left arm and pulled him up with her hand and then pushed his back a few times, unsealing his pressure points. Yang Guo quickly backed away. He saw that she unsealed Zhao Zhijing's pressure points with ease. He knew that her martial arts were far superior Zhao Zhijing's. Yang Guo was afraid of her and kept a distance between himself and Sun Bu'Er. Though she had been practicing Taoism for many years, she was still very stubborn and strong. She saw that his kung fu was extremely crafty, it looked like that it was their sect's Black Star; if she fought herself she might not be able to win, so she called out, "Let's go!" She then said goodbye to Guo

Jing and Huang Rong. Her sleeve swept out and she leapt out of the study through the window, and then jumped up onto the roof.

Yin Zhiping had seemed to be out of it all this time; he wanted to tell Guo Jing and Huang Rong what happened when Zhao Zhijing angrily shouted, "What more is there to talk about?" He pulled on his sleeve and the two of them leapt out of the window and then followed Sun Bu'Er.

With Guo Jing's and Huang Rong's awareness, of course they knew that Zhao Zhijing's pressure points had been sealed, but Yang Guo had not stretched out his finger, could it be that a eminent person was secretly helping him?

Guo Jing immediately went over to the window to take a look, where was the person? Guo Jing thought that as Zhao Zhijing was about to kill him, he couldn't bear to and so pretended to have his pressure points sealed and left in the confusion. However, Huang Rong could see this was the doing of Yang Guo, firstly because she was behind him and couldn't see his elbow and secondly, she was not aware of the existence of a martial art skill such as the "Jade Heart Manual". This enabled the prediction of the enemy's reaction and countered the skills of Quanzhen without reply; she wasn't able to understand exactly what had happened. She wouldn't act like Guo Jing and view others with the heart of a gentleman. When she saw the four Quanzhen Taoists sweeping their sleeves and leaving, it was very impolite, secretly, she was furious. She pondered and turned around to see Guo Fu's dark green shoes sticking out from under the bookshelf, she immediately called out, "Fu'er, what are you doing here?"

Guo Fu laughed and came out with a silly look on her face and said, "Me and the Wu brothers are looking for a book to read."

Huang Rong knows that the three of them have never been interested in books, why would they have suddenly taken an interest today? One look at her daughter's face and she knew that they must sneaked in earlier to hide so they can eavesdrop on what was happening. As she was about to tell them off, a Beggar Clan member came with news of a guest arriving, she took a look at Yang Guo and then she and Guo Jing went out to meet the guest.

Guo Jing said to the Wu brothers, "Brother Yang is a childhood friend of yours, take good care of him."

The Wu brothers had never been friendly with Yang Guo; right now they looked at the state that he was in. They knew that he hadn't learned any martial arts at the Quanzhen sect and was called 'bastard, animal' by his Master. They looked down on him even more; they summoned a servant and told him to take care of Yang Guo.

However, Guo Fu was very curious about Yang Guo, she asked, "Brother Yang, why doesn't your Master want you?"

Yang Guo said, "There are many reasons. I'm dumb and lazy, I have a bad temper and I don't know how to treat the relatives of my Master well. 'Buying horse whips and donkey whips and what nots'."

When the Wu brothers heard this their faces changed, Wu Xiuwen was the first who couldn't control himself anymore and shouted, "What did you say?"

Yang Guo said, "I said I'm useless, I don't know how to please my Master."

Guo Fu smiled captivately, and said, "Your Master is a Taoist, how would he have a daughter?" Yang Guo saw her smile, it was as if a flower suddenly blossomed, bright, beautiful and glamorous, unconsciously his heart jumped,

his face went red and he turned his head away. Guo Fu had managed to control the Wu brothers and could mess them around long ago, now she saw Yang Guo turn his head away and knew that he was moved by her beauty, she was very proud of herself.

Yang Guo looked to the west and saw a couplet on the wall, the first line said: 'The image of peach blossoms descending with the divine flying sword', the second line was 'The jade sea brings new waves according the jade flute'. Yang Guo has seen this couplet in the practicing sword pavilion on Peach Blossom Island. He knew that it was Huang Yaoshi who wrote it but underneath this couplet was signed 'The five useless people who were ill fated'. Compared to the three people in front of him, he was only a few years older but as he read and studied the writing it was as if he was ten years older. When he saw the words 'the five useless people', he remembered about himself, how all those close to him had either died or have gone away; he wandered the world alone, there was no difference between himself and a useless person. The pride he felt just now forcing Zhao Zhijing to scamper away disappeared; a sad, lamenting feeling filled his heart, he couldn't stop himself from dropping his head and pitying himself.

Guo Fu softly said, "Brother Yang, go and rest, I'll come and speak with you tomorrow."

Yang Guo calmly replied, "Fine!" He followed the servant out of the study and heard Guo Fu flare up at the Wu brothers, "I want to speak with him; can you two stop me? His kung fu is not good, I'll ask father to teach him."

End of Chapter 11.

Chapter 12 - The Heroes' Feast

Translated by Noodles



Yang Guo said, "Miss Guo, please tell your parents that I've gone." Guo Fu was shocked and said, "You're fine, so why are you leaving?" Yang Guo

gave a dull laugh and said, "There's no reason, originally I came here for no real reason, and now that I've been here I feel I should go."

The next morning, while Yang Guo was eating breakfast in the hall, Guo Fu signaled him to the courtyard. The Wu brothers were at the side looking a bit troubled. Yang Guo was amused and went over to Guo Fu and asked, "You're looking for me?"

Guo Fu laughed and said, "Yes, come with me outside, I want to ask what you've done in the last few years." Yang Guo exhaled deeply, thinking that it wasn't easy to explain, even if he spoke for three days and nights he would not have finished, and how could he reveal these things to her?

The two of them walked shoulder to shoulder to the main door, Yang Guo slightly turned his head and saw the two Wu brothers following. Guo Fu had noticed a long time ago and pretended that she didn't see them and talked to Yang Guo. Yang Guo picked some insignificant events to talk about, he pushed and pulled making Guo Fu laugh. She knew that Yang Guo was keeping things from her but she still felt amused by his words. The two slowly walked to a Willow tree. Suddenly they heard a neigh; a skinny and scabby horse came hurrying over to Yang Guo, rubbing against him in an affectionate manner.

When the Wu brothers saw such an ugly horse, they couldn't hold themselves back and burst out laughing. They went over to the two. Wu Xiuwen laughed and said, "That precious horse is very special, only someone with your ability could one find a horse like that. When are you going to find me one like that?"

Wu Dunru said seriously, "That is a Da Shi Guo's (Great Master Guo's) priceless treasure, how could you buy it?"

Guo Fu looked at Yang Guo and then at the ugly horse, when she saw the two had the same dirty and pitiful appearance, she couldn't resist laughing. Yang Guo laughed and said, "I'm ugly, my horse is ugly, we're a match. The horses that the Wu brothers ride must be very spirited horses."

Wu Xiuwen said, "The horses that we ride are only a bit better than yours. Sister Fu's red horse, now that is a precious horse. You've seen it before when you were on Peach Blossom Island."

Yang Guo said, "So Uncle Guo gave the red horse to a girl."

The four of them chatted as they walked. Guo Fu suddenly pointed to the west and said, "Look, mother's teaching stick techniques again." Yang Guo turned his head and saw Huang Rong with an old beggar walking towards the mountainside, the two of them holding a stick in their hands.

Wu Xiuwen said, "Elder Lu is so dumb, he's been practicing the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" for so long but he still hasn't managed to learn it."

When Yang Guo heard the words "Dog Beating Stick Technique" his heart trembled but he didn't show any signs of it, he turned around and looked away, pretending to appreciate the scenery. He heard Guo Fu say, "The "Dog Beating Stick Technique" is the treasure of the Beggar Clan; my mother said that the mastery and ingenuity of the stances are unbeatable. It has the most powerful stances in the world of weapons; you can't just learn it in ten days or a fortnight. You said he's dumb, are you very clever?"

Wu Dunru sighed and said, "It's a pity that apart from the Chief of the Beggar Clan, no one is allowed to learn it."

Guo Fu said, "If you become the Chief of the Beggar Clan in the future, Chief Lu will impart it to you. Even my father does not know this skill, there's no need to cry."

Wu Dunru said, "How can I be the Chief of the Beggar Clan? Sister Fu, why did Master's wife select Elder Lu to replace her?"

Guo Fu said, "Over the last few years, my mother just held the title. The running of the clan is all done by Elder Lu Youjiao. All the many bothersome things that go on in the clan give my mother a headache. She said why is it necessary to have the name and not do anything; so why not pass the position on to Elder Lu and make it official. Once Elder Lu learns the "Dog Beating Stick Technique", my mother will pass on the position to him officially."

Wu Xiuwen said, "Sister Fu, how exactly do you use the "Dog Beating Stick Technique"? Have you seen it before?"

Guo Fu said, "I haven't seen it. Ah, I have seen it!" She picked up a branch off the ground and lightly attacked his shoulder and laughed, "It's like this."

Wu Xiuwen called out, "Fine, just see if I'll let you go now you've called me a dog." He stretched out his hand to grab her. Guo Fu laughed and jumped away. Wu Xiuwen chased after her. The two ran around a few times and returned to their original places.

Guo Fu laughed and said, "Little Brother Wu, don't get angry. I've got an idea."

Wu Xiuwen said, "Fine, tell me."

Guo Fu said, "We'll watch in secret, we can see exactly how special the "Dog Beating Technique" is." Wu Xiuwen clapped his hand in agreement.

But Wu Dunru shook his head and said, "If Master's wife finds out we are secretly trying to learn the skill she will lecture us severely."

Guo Fu said, "We are just going to watch, we're not trying to learn it in secret. Anyway, an ingenious and masterly kung fu such as this, how could you learn it after just a few glances? Big brother Wu, so do you count as someone who's amazing?" After this put down, he just smiled slightly. Guo Fu continued, "Last night when we were in the study eavesdropping, did my mother shout at anyone? You're just a little chicken. Little Brother Wu, let's go."

Wu Dunru said, "Fine, fine, your reasoning does make some sense; I'll go with you."

Guo Fu said, "Is it possible that you don't want to watch one of the world's best skills? It doesn't matter if you don't go, once I've learned it I'll come back and beat you with it." As she said this she raised her stick and waved it at him.

The three of them had heard about the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" a long time ago and were fascinated by it but they had never seen what it looked like. Guo Jing once discussed martial arts with them; he told them how years ago on Mount Jun Huang Rong used the technique at the Beggar Clan's gathering to beat everyone there and claimed the position of the Chief of the Beggar Clan. The three of them listened enchanted. Right now Guo Fu was encouraging them to take a look, though Wu Dunru spoke out against it, in his heart there wasn't anything he wanted to do more. He pretended to be coerced into it and all he's

doing is listening to Guo Fu's suggestion; if they are found out then his Master's wife can't blame him.

Guo Fu said, "Brother Yang, you come as well." Yang Guo was gazing at the faraway mountains as if he was absorbed in thought and didn't hear what they said. Guo Fu called out again and Yang Guo turned his head around, his face looked lost, he asked, "Fine, fine, follow you where?"

Guo Fu said, "Don't ask; just follow me."

Wu Dunru said, "Sister Fu, why do you want him to come, he won't understand; his dumb brain is going to make some noise, how can Master's wife not notice?"

Guo Fu said, "Relax, I'll take care of him. You two go first; brother Yang and I will follow. The four of us will make too much noise with our footsteps." The Wu brothers didn't want to but they knew they couldn't defy Guo Fu's orders. The two of them walked ahead discontentedly.

Guo Fu called out, "We'll hide in a large tree nearby first; my mother will not notice if we are careful and don't make any noise." The Wu brothers nodded in reply and quickened their steps.

Guo Fu glanced at Yang Guo and saw his clothes were extremely ragged and torn, she said, "When we get back I'll get mother to buy you some new clothes; once you've changed, you won't be as ugly."

Yang Guo shook his head and said, "I was born ugly; even if I change clothes and tidy myself up I'll still be ugly." Guo Fu said fine and didn't take it to mind; she glanced at the backs of the Wu brothers and gave out a light sigh.

Yang Guo said, "Why are you sighing?"

Guo Fu said, "My mind is really troubled, you wouldn't understand."

Yang Guo saw a delicate redness on her face, her eyebrows slightly wrinkled, she really was an extremely beautiful girl. Compared to Lu Wushuang, Wanyan Ping and Yelu Yan, she was more beautiful than they. His heart was moved slightly and said, "I know why you are so troubled."

Guo Fu said, "That's strange, how would you know? You really are talking rubbish."

Yang Guo said, "Fine, if I guess correctly, you can't deny it."

Guo Fu placed her little white and tender finger against her right cheek, her pupils glimmered, a smile was on her lips and said, "Fine, take a guess."

Yang Guo said, "It's not simple. The Wu brothers both like you, they both try to please you, and it's hard for you to give up one of them."

After hearing this, Guo Fu's heart raced. He knows about this, the Wu brothers know about this, her parents know about this and even Ke Zhen'E knows about this. But it was hard for anyone to mention it; everyone knew in their hearts but no one mentioned a word about it. Now, Yang Guo suddenly mentioned this matter, she couldn't stop her face from going red; she was happy but sad, she wanted to laugh but also wanted to cry, droplets of tears rolled from her eyes.

Yang Guo said, "You're thinking 'Big Brother Wu is courteous and reliable, Little Brother Wu can keep me entertained. The two of them are both handsome, their martial arts are excellent and they treat me with respect and listen to me. The elder has his good points, the younger

has his strong points; I'm just one person, how can I marry two men?"

Guo Fu listened to him startled, after she heard his last sentence, she said, "Your mouth is full of rubbish, who wants to pay attention to what you say?"

From her reaction, Yang Guo knew he had guessed correctly, he quietly repeated, "I'm just one person, how can I marry two men?" After repeating it a few times, Guo Fu still seemed to have something on her mind; it was as if she didn't hear him.

After a while she said, "Brother Yang, tell me, who do you think the better of the brothers?" She asked this quite suddenly. Though she and Yang Guo were childhood friends, there was still some animosity between the two even though they not seen each other for a long time. Now that they're grown up, how can she reveal such things to him? Yang Guo is a lively person, as long as you don't get on the wrong side of him, he will joke with you, laugh with you, in a flash he will make you feel as if you were in a spring breeze, as if you were drinking a beautiful wine. Anyway, Guo Fu had gone over this hundreds and thousands of times in her mind. She felt that both of them had their good points; when it came to playing around and joking, she got on with Wu Xiuwen very well, but when it came to doing something serious Wu Dunru was much better. She was a girl going through puberty; she would alternate from being angry with them, or be pleased with them. She made the brothers fall in love with her; in her heart she was really troubled, she didn't know who to treat better. As she and Yang Guo raised this point she couldn't help herself but ask this question.

Yang Guo laughed and said, "I don't think either of them is good."

Guo Fu was startled and asked, "Why?"

Yang Guo laughed and said, "If those two are good then what chance have I, Yang Guo, got?" He had been used to joking around with Lu Wushuang on the road and he didn't mean what he just said, he was just teasing her when he said it.

Guo Fu was stunned, she was a girl who was used to being pampered and treated well, no one has ever said half an offensive word to her. Right now she didn't know whether or not to be angry; she put on serious face and said, "If you don't want to say, fine, who wants to joke with you? Let's go." As she said this she utilized her lightness kung fu and hurried along the small path to the mountainside.

Yang Guo felt there was no point to this and thought, "Why am I mixing with these three? I'd rather be far away and be on my own!" He turned around and slowly walked away, thinking, "The Wu brothers think that girl is a goddess, they're afraid that she won't marry them. If they really marry her, and spend everyday with such a pretty yet bullying girl, they will definitely experience more pain than joy, huh; crazy people like them are very funny."

Guo Fu hurried for a while and assumed that Yang Guo would go after her and apologize; but after stopping for a while there was no trace of Yang Guo. She had a thought and said, "That person does not know martial arts, of course he won't be able to catch up. She turned around and returned to see that he had actually gone in the opposite direction. She thought this was strange and went over to Yang Guo. She asked, "Why aren't you coming?"

Yang Guo said, "Miss Guo, please tell your parents that I've gone."

Guo Fu was shocked and said, "You're fine, so why are you leaving?"

Yang Guo gave a dull laugh and said, "There's no reason, originally I came here for no real reason, and now that I've been here I feel I should go."

Guo Fu has always like crowded atmospheres; although she didn't think very highly of Yang Guo, listening to him joking felt fresher and newer than listening to the Wu brothers. She really didn't want him to leave, she said, "Brother Yang, we haven't seen each other a long time, I have many things to say to you. Anyway, tonight is the 'Heroes Feast, all the heroes from all over the world will be gathering here, why don't you want to experience this?"

Yang Guo said, "I'm not a hero, if I'm actually there, won't I just become an object of ridicule in front of all the heroes?"

Guo Fu said, "That makes sense." She pondered for a while and said, "There are many people in the Lu Manor who don't know martial arts, just eat and drink with the servants."

When Yang heard this he was very angry, he thought, "Little Bitch, you class me with nobodies." His face didn't show any signs of anger; he laughed and said, "That's a pretty good idea." He had wanted to leave but now had a change of heart, he decided he was going to do something that would embarrass and disgrace her. Guo Fu was used to being pampered and cared for. She wasn't wise and didn't understand worldly matters; she didn't have any ill intent in her words and didn't know that she had deeply offended someone.

She saw that Yang Guo had changed his mind, she laughed and said, "Let's go, if we're late and mother gets there first, we won't be able to peek." She hurried ahead with Yang

Guo following behind, he appeared out of breath and his footsteps seemed heavy showing that he was extremely clumsy and inept. They easily arrived in time at the place where Huang Rong normally taught Lu Youjiao the stick techniques. They saw the Wu brothers in a tree looking out. Guo Fu leapt up on the branch and then reached out her hand to Yang Guo pulling him up. When Yang Guo held her soft and warm hand, he couldn't stop his heart from stirring but immediately thought, "Even if you were ten times as beautiful, you can't compare with my Gu Gu."

Guo Fu quietly asked, "My mother hasn't arrived yet?"

Wu Xiuwen pointed to the west and quietly replied, "Elder Lu is practicing over there, Master and Master's wife went away to talk about something."

The only person that Guo Fu is afraid of is her father, when she heard that he was here she felt slightly uneasy. But when she saw Lu Youjiao holding a bamboo stick pointing to the east and stirring to the west, she forgot her fear and quietly said, "That's the "Dog Beating Stick Technique"?"

Wu Dunru said, "Most likely. Master's wife was teaching him when Master came over and said he had something to discuss with her, he led her to the side while Elder Lu practiced by himself."

Guo Fu watched a few stances and felt that it was sluggish and didn't see anything special about it, she said, "Elder Lu hasn't learned it yet, and it isn't nice to watch, let's go."

Yang Guo saw that the stances that Elder Lu was using were identical to the ones that Hong Qigong taught him on top of Mount Hua, he chuckled in his heart, "That girl doesn't know anything."

The Wu brothers always followed Guo Fu's orders, they were about to jump down when they heard footsteps below; the Guo couple were walking over. They heard Guo Jing say, "Of course a decision about Fu'er's future can't be decided so lightly and suddenly. But Guo'er is young; it is unavoidable that young people will get into trouble. That business with the Quanzhen sect doesn't seem to be all his fault."

Huang Rong said, "I don't care about him causing trouble at Quanzhen. You are respecting the long friendship between the families of Yang and Guo, as you should. But Yang Guo is very crafty, the more I look at him the more he looks like his father, how can I relax and allow Fu'er to get married to him?" When Yang Guo, Guo Fu and the Wu brothers heard this, they all were shocked. The four of them knew that the Guo and Yang families had some ties but they didn't know that the previous generations had such deep ties. They could never have guessed that Guo Jing wanted to betroth his daughter to Yang Guo. That sentence affects all four of them, they all listened carefully, their hearts all racing.

Guo Jing said, "Brother Yang Kang was unfortunate that he ended up in the Jin palace and fell in with the wrong crowd. That's how he ended up like he did, in the end he died without a full corpse. (a soul?) Had he been in the care of Uncle Yang Tiexin, he would never have ended up like that."

Huang Rong sighed as she remembered the frightening events of that night at Jiaxing's Iron Spear Temple, her heart froze and she quietly said, "You could say that."

Yang Guo does not fully understand his background, he knew that his father died earlier by someone's hand but his own mother never revealed how he died or who killed him. Now he heard Guo Jing talking about his father and

mentioned 'ended up in the Jin palace and fell in with the wrong crowd' and 'died without a full corpse', his body quivered as if he was struck by lightning, his face turned grey. Guo Fu glanced at him and saw that he was looking like he was in a trance; she was frightened and worried that he would suddenly fall and drop to his death.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong sat down on a rock with their backs to the tree. Guo Jing lightly stroked Huang Rong's arm and warmly said, "Since you've been carrying our second child, your body has not been feeling well; quickly pass on all the responsibilities of the Beggar Clan to Lu Youjiao so you can rest properly."

Guo Fu was delighted, "So mother's having a baby, it'll be great to have a little brother. How come mother never told me about this?"

Huang Rong said, "I don't worry about the matters of the Beggar Clan that much. What I'm worried about is Fu'er's future."

Guo Jing said, "Since the Quanzhen won't take in Guo'er, I'll teach him myself. He's a very clever boy, once he's learned all my skills in the future, the brotherly vow between his father and I won't have been in vain." Yang Guo now knew that Guo Jing was his father's sworn brother, the words 'Uncle Guo' had a real meaning behind it, when he heard Guo Jing treating him with love in his words he was touched, tears almost rolled from of his eyes.

Huang Rong said, "That's what I'm afraid of, in case he's too clever for his own good. That's why I taught him to study and didn't teach him any martial arts. I hoped that he would become a deep, understanding and righteous man, even if he didn't know any martial arts. I would have happily betrothed Fu'er to him in that case."

Guo Jing said, "You have always planned everything to the last detail. This idea would have been good but with Fu'er's temper and martial arts, wouldn't having her to marry a weak scholar be a bit harsh for her? Tell me, how could she respect him? In my opinion such a couple would not get on well with each other."

Huang Rong laughed and said, "You're shameless! So the reason why we are such a good couple is because you have better martial arts than me. Hero Guo, come, come, come, let's have a duel."

Guo Jing laughed and said, "Fine, Chief Huang, give me your best." A light sound was heard as Huang Rong lightly patted on Guo Jing's shoulder.

After a while Huang Rong sighed and said, "Ah... this matter is complicated, even with Guo'er to one side, how can you separate the two Wu brothers? In your opinion, who is better?" Guo Fu and the Wu brother's hearts naturally jumped. This wasn't related to Yang Guo but he wanted to hear Guo Jing's opinion of the two.

He heard Guo Jing go 'hmm' and didn't say anything for a while, in the end he said, "I can't give my opinions on them on small matters. Only when a person is faced with an important matter will they show their real character." His voice became soft and said, "Fu'er is still young, we can still wait a few years. It could be that by then everything will have sorted itself out and we won't have to worry about it. There's no need to exert your self too much when teaching Lu Youjiao the stick techniques. In the last few days I've noticed that you don't seem to look well, I'm worried. I'll go and find Guo'er and talk to him." After he said this he got up and walked to the road.

Huang Rong sat on the rock and evened her breathing for a while before she instructed Lu Youjiao to come over and perform the techniques. Lu Youjiao displayed all thirty-six strokes of the technique, but Lu Youjiao had yet to understand the formulae. Huang Rong kept her patience and explained everything more clearly to him. The stances of the “Dog Beating Stick Techniques” are of course ingenious and masterly, and the formulae behind it extremely clever and ingenious, otherwise how could a little bamboo stick become the treasure of the Beggar Clan? Even with Ouyang Feng’s great skills he had to think deep and hard for a long while; how could the opponent overcome a stance or half a move? Huang Rong had used a month’s time to teach Lu Youjiao the stances. Now she recited the formulae and the principles behind the changes a few times, and told him to remember this. When it comes to understanding and being able to use the skill, it depends on the person’s ability and intelligence. The Master cannot teach the disciple this.

Guo Fu and the Wu brothers did not understand the stick techniques, they didn’t have a clue as to what was going on. What the ‘seal’ point was like, how the ‘coil’ aim was meant to be, how the eighteenth change transforms into the nineteenth change and how the nineteenth change can be altered into the twentieth change. The three of them wanted to leap down from the tree but were afraid that Huang Rong would discover them; they hoped that she would go through it quickly and then leave with Lu Youjiao. But who could have guessed that Huang Rong had decided to hand over the position of Chief to Lu Youjiao today before the ‘Heroes Feast’. She decided she would impart all the formulae to him now, if he didn’t understand it she would slowly go over it with him later on. According to the rules of the clan, when he takes over the position he must have learned the “Dog Beating Stick Technique”; this is why that

she spoke almost non-stop for around two hours. However, Lu Youjiao wasn't the most gifted and he was now old, his memory is fading, how could he remember all this in just a short time? Huang Rong kept on going, passage after passage; it was hard for him to remember everything. Huang Rong had met Guo Jing when she was fifteen and was used to being around someone who was slow and not the most gifted. She was angry about Lu Youjiao's poor memory. The rules of the clan states that the formulae to the technique must be passed on down orally and must not be written down. Otherwise writing it down and letting him slowly memorize it would have saved a lot of effort and energy.

That day on the peak of Mount Hua after both Hong Qigong and Ouyang Feng had suffered internal injuries in their duel, Hong Qigong had taught Yang Guo every stance and every change so that he could perform it for Ouyang Feng. But he didn't teach him a single word of the formulae that are needed when fighting an enemy. Hong Qigong thought that without the formulae, the techniques would be useless to him. This doesn't really go against the rules of the clan and at the time he wasn't fighting Ouyang Feng for real, so there was no need to pass on the formulae to the technique. Who could have guessed that Yang Guo would now hear the whole thing in its entirety? He was over a hundred times more gifted than Lu Youjiao; after just three recitations he was able to remember the whole thing without forgetting a word, but Lu Youjiao still wasn't able to remember as he recited it ambiguously.

When Huang Rong became pregnant for the second time, she became careless one day while meditating and disturbed the chi of the fetus; because of this she has become very weak. Today she had taught for over half a day and had become very tired, she sat on the rock and rested,

she closed her eyes for a while and then called out, “Fu’er, Ru’er, Wen’er, Guo’er, come down at once!”

The four of them were shocked and thought, “So she knew we were here long ago!”

Guo Fu said, “Mother, you really are great, nothing can be kept from you.” As she said this she used a stance of “The Forest Sends a Sparrow” and lightly leapt down in front of her. The Wu brothers followed while Yang Guo climbed down slowly.

Huang Rong gave a ‘heng’ sound and said, “You wanted to steal a look with your kung fu? If I couldn’t even notice you little rascals, I’m afraid that when that I’m traveling around Jianghu I’d be ambushed in half a day.”

Guo Fu felt embarrassed by her mother’s comments but knew that her mother was lenient and wasn’t afraid of being scolded by her. She laughed and said, “Mother, I brought these three along to take a look at the world famous “Dog Beating Stick Technique”, but who knew that when Elder Lu uses it, the skill doesn’t look good at all. Mother, perform the skill for us.”

Huang Rong laughed and took the bamboo stick from Lu Youjiao’s hand, she said, “Fine, watch out, I’m going to trip a little puppy.”

Guo Fu concentrated on her lower body, as soon as the bamboo stick comes towards her, she will immediately jump and avoid the trip. Huang Rong’s bamboo stick flashed across, Guo Fu quickly leapt up, her legs were half way away from the ground when the bamboo stick came across and skillfully and lightly tripped her up. Guo Fu got up and called out, “I’m not taking about that! It was my fault.”

Huang Rong laughed and said, "Fine, you chose what you want to do."

Guo Fu steadied herself in the Mount Posture and stood solidly, she had another thought and then said, "Big brother Wu and little brother Wu, come to my side and get into the Mount Posture as well." The Wu brothers did as they were told and stood solidly. Guo Fu stretched out her arm and hooked it around the Wu brothers' arms combining the strength of the three, as solid as Mount Tai. She said, "Mother, I'm not afraid of you, only father's "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms" can push us."

Huang Rong gave a slight smile and waved the stick across the three's faces, a strong gust of wind rushed upon them. The three of them all moved backwards to avoid it, the Mount Posture of the lower body loosened as a result. Huang Rong's bamboo stick returned and used the 'turn' formulae, the stick brushed across the three's legs, the three of them could not stand steady and all fell down at the same time. At least the three's kung fu had a good foundation, their bodies had just touched the ground slightly and they up immediately. Guo Fu called out, "Mother, that's just trickery; I'm not taking about that either."

Huang Rong laughed and said, "Just now I passed on the eight formulae to Lu Youjiao, 'trip', 'chop', 'coil', 'poke', 'stir', 'lead', 'seal' and 'turn'; which one uses reckless strength? You said this is trickery, that's correct, in the martial arts, ninety percent of it is used to trick someone, as long as you've tricked a skilled fighter, you've won. Only your father's "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms" type of martial arts uses real kung fu to battle and doesn't use any sort of trickery. But how many people in the world can reach such a stage?"

These words made Yang Guo nod in secret, he remembered the formulae that Huang Rong had recited and combined it with the stances that Hong Qigong taught him, the ingenuity and mastery behind it really was boundless. Though Guo Fu and the others understood what Huang Rong said, they didn't appreciate the meaning behind it. Huang Rong continued, "The "Dog Beating Stick Technique" is Wulin's most unique kung fu, it forms a branch on its own, and does not involve any other sect's kung fu. If you just learn the stances but don't know the formulae to accompany it, it is useless. Even if you are extremely clever it will be very difficult to come up with formulae to accompany the stances. But if you just know the formulae without me personally teaching you the stances, and only know the eight words 'trip', 'chop', 'coil', 'poke', 'stir', 'lead', 'seal' and 'turn', the result is the same. Because of this I'm not afraid of letting you four rascals eavesdrop. If I teach any sort of kung fu, without my permission, you must not eavesdrop or practice in secret ever, understand?"

Guo Fu agreed and laughed, "Mother, why should I try to practice your kung fu in secret? Could it be that you have other skills that you dare not teach me?"

Huang Rong used the bamboo stick to lightly hit Guo Fu's behind, she laughed, "Go and play with your two Wu brothers. Guo'er, I want to speak with you. Elder Lu, take your time, if you can't remember it all I'll teach you again tomorrow." Lu Youjiao, Guo Fu and the Wu brothers went on their way back to the Lu Manor, only Yang Guo remained.

Yang Guo's heart raced, he was afraid that Huang Rong knew that he had secretly learned the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" and now wanted to take his life. Huang Rong saw the frightened expression on Yang Guo's face; she took his hand and told him to sit down on the rock. She softly

said, "Guo'er, there are many things that I don't understand about you, if I ask you, I know you won't tell me. But I can't blame you. When I was young I was extremely eccentric, your Uncle Guo had to tolerate me in everything I did." As she got up to this point, she lightly sighed and then a smile came across her face as she remembered the times when she vented her anger when she was younger. She continued, "I didn't teach you martial arts because I wanted what's best for you, who could've known that this caused you to suffer many hardships instead. Your Uncle Guo loves and adores me; of course I will do my best to repay his love. He has great faith in you and hopes that you will become a great man. I will do my best to help you so his wish can be granted. Guo'er, don't ever disappoint him, please!"

Yang Guo has never heard Huang Rong speak to him like this before, soft, gentle and sincere, he saw her eyes were filled with love and he couldn't stop himself from being moved, hot blood rose to his chest and he groaned. Huang Rong stroked his hair and softly said, "Guo'er, I won't keep anything from you anymore. In the past I didn't like your father, which is why I have always disliked you. But from now on, I will treat you well; once my body has recovered I will teach you all the martial arts I know. Uncle Guo said he will do the same thing as well."

Yang Guo was feeling sadder, he cried even louder and choked, "Auntie Guo, there are many things that I've kept from you, I'll...I'll... I'll tell you everything."

Huang Rong stroked his hair and said, "Today I'm very tired, it won't be too late if you tell me in a few days, all you've got to do is be a good child and I'll be happy. When the Beggar Clan's meeting is on, come and take a look."

Yang Guo thought that important news such as the passing away of Hong Qigong needed to be revealed at the meeting,

he wiped his tears and kept on nodding.

The two of them spoke with their true feelings under the tree and managed to scatter away the mutual dislike that they used to have for each other. As they finished, Yang Guo's tears turned into a smile, he remembered the faith and love that Guo Jing had in his words to him, this is the first time he had felt so warm and affectionate since he and Xiao Longnu split up.

After speaking for a while, Huang Rong felt a slight pain in her stomach; she slowly got up and said, "Let's go." She held his hand and they slowly walked.

Yang Guo thought that he should tell her the news of the Hong Qigong's death and said, "Auntie Guo, I have something very important I have to tell you."

Huang Rong just felt the chi in her 'dan tian' was uncomfortable and not fluent; she frowned and said, "Tell me tomorrow, I'm... I'm not feeling well."

Yang Guo saw that she was pale and couldn't help from worrying, he felt her hand was slightly cold, he became bold and secretly circulated his chi and sent a warm energy from his hand into her. When he and Xiao Longnu were practicing the "Jade Heart Manual" on Mount Zhongnan, he had become very fluent in this technique of passing energy through the palms. But he was afraid that his and Huang Rong's internal energy would clash with each other so at the start he only sent a little; afterwards when he felt no resistance, he started to increase the energy. Huang Rong felt the internal energy that he was passing on was soft and concentrated; it was very different to the internal energies of the Quanzhen sect. It was soft and fluid, it wasn't below the skilled fighters of Quanzhen, her body had a use for it and in a short while she felt the opposing chi and her blood

flow became more fluid and comfortable, her cheeks glowed, she was surprised, "Where did the child learn this advanced internal energy?" She smiled at him.

Just as she was about to ask him, Guo Fu called out from afar, "Mother, mother, guess who's here?"

Huang Rong laughed and said, "Today all the heroes of the world are gathered here, how do I know who's here?" She suddenly had a thought and said happily, "Ah, it's the Wu's Martial Uncles; I haven't seen them for many years."

Guo Fu said, "Mother, you are really clever, how did you get it in one guess?"

Huang Rong smiled and said, "What's hard about that? The Wu brothers never leave your side, since they're not following, it must be because their relatives have arrived." Yang Guo has always been assured of his intelligence but when he saw that Huang Rong predicted things like a god, he couldn't stop himself from being startled and in awe of her.

Huang Rong continued, "Fu'er, congratulations, you can learn another advanced martial art but I'm afraid that you might not be able to learn it."

Guo Fu asked, "What kung fu?"

Yang Guo blurted out, "The 'Solitary Yang Finger'!"

Guo Fu ignored him and said, "What do you know? Mother, what kung fu is it?"

Huang Rong laughed and said, "Hasn't brother Yang mentioned it?"

Guo Fu said, "Ai... so mother told you." Yang Guo and Huang Rong both smiled and didn't say anything. Huang

Rong thought, "Guo'er is very intelligent, he's ten times cleverer than the Wu brothers. And there's no need to mention Fu'er. He knows that the "Solitary Yang Finger" is Reverend Yideng's skill, the Wu brothers' Martial Uncles are here, and they will pity the Wu brothers because of their parents and will definitely teach them the "Solitary Yang Finger". The brothers are always trying to please Fu'er, whatever they learn will be passed onto her."

Guo Fu was surprised, "Why did mother tell Yang Guo first, could it be that she wants to betroth me to that little beggar?" When she thought about this, she gave Yang Guo a look and put on a silly face.

Reverend Yideng of Dali has four disciples: 'Fisherman, Woodsman, Farmer, and Scholar'. The Wu brothers' father Wu Santong is the third disciple, Farmer. Ever since the battle with Li Mochou where he was wounded, he hadn't been seen since. The ones that have arrived for the 'Heroes Feast' today are the Fisherman, Si Shuiyuyin and the Scholar, Zhu Ziliu. Whenever Huang Rong and Zhu Ziliu meet, they start to battle with their wits. They haven't seen each other for over ten years and as soon as they saw each other, they were at it again. After the greetings, Si Shuiyuyin and Zhu Ziliu found a room and they indeed did start to teach the "Solitary Yang Finger" to the Wu brothers.

That morning, the Lu Manor was filled with countless heroes and good men; though the Lu Manor was large, there were people everywhere. After lunch, the members of the Beggar Clan assembled in the forest outside the Lu Manor. The ceremony of the old Chief passing the position to a new one is the grandest ceremony in the Beggar Clan. All the members from the east, south, west and north no matter what rank gathered here. The heroes that were

invited to the Lu Manor were also invited to watch the ceremony.

Over the last ten years or so, Lu Youjiao had helped Huang Rong in running all the matters of the clan; he was just, he did things boldly and accepted the consequences, the members from the 'dirty' clothed and 'clean' clothed factions all respected him. Elder Jian of the 'clean' clothed faction had passed away, Elder Liang has been incapacitated by illness and Elder Peng had revolted and left. There wasn't anyone that could challenge for the position of chief; this is why this year's ceremony proceeded smoothly. Huang Rong acted accordingly to the clan's rules, after passing on the clan's historic treasure, the Dog Beating Stick, to Lu Youjiao, she and the rest of the members spat on him to complete the procession. His face and body was covered in spittle.

Yang Guo saw that this procession was extremely strange. He was just about to go and tell them the news of Hong Qigong's death when suddenly an old beggar leapt up onto a rock and said loudly, "Chief Hong Lao has an order, he told me to tell everyone." When the clan members heard this they all gave a cheer. They hadn't had any news from Hong Qigong for over ten years, they all missed him, now they heard that he had news, they all called out in joy. An old beggar in the crowd called out, "Blessings to Elder Hong Lao!" The crowd all cheered, their voices really shook the earth. Cheer followed after cheer, and only after a while did it cease.

Yang Guo saw that everyone was moved, some even had tears on their faces, he thought, "If a man can achieve respect like this, his life will not be in vain. Look at all these people's joy, how can I tell them that Hong Qigong has passed away? Never mind the fact that I'm a nobody; if I tell them such news they might not believe me. Once they hear

this there'll be chaos, this isn't good news anyway, why spoil things for them?" He continued his thought, "If they asked 'how did Hong Qigong die', I can't keep the fact that he was dueling with Godfather from them. The Wu brothers know that I've learned the "Toad Stance" from Godfather, what reason have they got not to tell everyone this? There are many beggars here and it would be unavoidable for some of them to be suspicious that I might have helped my Godfather kill Chief Hong Lao. I'll have no way to argue against hundreds of mouths. After the meeting I will explain everything carefully to Auntie Guo and allow her to tell them the news." He thought that it was fortunate for him that the old beggar dashed out and allowed him time to think, if he blurted it out, he would have caused himself a lot of trouble. He heard the old Beggar say, "Half a year ago, I was on the Guangnandong road in the Shao province and met Elder Hong Lao in Xingjun, and drank wine with him. He's very healthy and his appetite is great; his drinking ability is the same as before and it's still the only one of its kind."

The crowd of beggars all cheered with delight again; within the cheers were sounds of laughter. That old beggar interrupted and continued, "Over the last few years, Chief Hong Lao has killed many unscrupulous officials and evil scoundrels who have terrorized our citizens. He said he had heard news that there are five evil bastards called the 'Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border' who are following the orders of the Mongols. They have done many evil things in places like Chuandong and Huguang, he said that he was going to take a look himself and if it is true, of course he's going to take their lives."

A middle-aged beggar got up and said, "The 'Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border', they caused trouble a while back, but they move without a trace, our brothers in Chuandong were

not able to find them. Recently, there has been no news of them; Chief Hong Lao must have sorted out this problem.” The beggars and heroes who watched the ceremony all applauded.

Yang Guo was gloomy, “How would you people know that after Chief Hong Lao and my Godfather made the ‘Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border’ into invalids, the two of them left the world not long after.”

The old beggar continued, “Chief Hong Lao said, ‘Right now the world is in a mess, the Mongols are slowly invading southwards, eating into our Song land. Those in our clan must have loyalty in our hearts, swear to kill our enemies and defend against aggressors with all our might.’ All the beggars agreed and their spirits soared. The beggar said, “The government is in a mess, corrupt ministers hold the power, and we can’t expect some rotten officials to protect the people and defend the land. They’ll never be able to do this. The foreign aggressors are getting closer, everyone must have the will to protect our country, and Chief Hong Lao ordered me to tell all of our brothers to remember the word ‘loyalty’.”

All the beggar clan members responded; they all called out, “We swear to follow Chief Hong Lao’s orders.”

Yang Guo had never been taught much since he was young and didn’t know how important the word ‘loyalty’ is; he saw the beggars all trembling with justice and righteousness, and he couldn’t stop himself from being touched. He felt that his making fools out of the Beggar Clan members before was wrong.

After the meeting, the clan’s matters were discussed; there was no need for the outsiders to listen and they took their leave.

When evening came, the Lu Manor was filled with lanterns and candles, all glowing brilliantly. There were over two hundred tables all together in the main hall, side halls, back and front halls, and the courtyard; over half of the world's heroes attended this feast. This 'Heroes Feast' is an exceptional event, a once in a lifetime event; if the host didn't have so many acquaintances who all respected him, it would be difficult for anyone to invite so many heroes of the Wulin world. Guo Jing and Huang Rong accompanied the main guests and sat in the main hall. Huang Rong arranged a place for Yang Guo and he sat at the table next to hers. Guo Fu and the Wu brothers sat quite a distance away.

Guo Fu was surprised at first and thought, "That person doesn't know martial arts, why did mother give him such a good seat?" She had a sudden thought, and couldn't stop herself from being alarmed, "Oh no, crap! Father said he was going to betroth me to him, could it be that mother is listening to father?" The more she thought about it the more frightened she became; she remembered how she saw her mother holding Yang Guo's hand while walking, looking very close. She also thought about how her father and mother respected each other, if her father wants to do this, mother would not disagree. She was worried and angry, she thought, "How can I get married to that little beggar?" She wanted to cry.

Wu Xiuwen happened to speak at this time, "Sister Fu, look at where that punk named Yang is sitting. He counts as a hero?"

Guo Fu forced out, "If you've any skill then drive him away!"

The Wu brothers had originally just looked down on him but after hearing Guo Jing saying that he wanted to betroth Guo Fu to him, they made him their enemy.

Wu Xiuwen heard what Guo Fu said and thought, "Why don't I insult and embarrass him? He'll be humiliated in front of all these heroes. Master's wife has always favored those with a strong character, when the one named Yang trips up in public, Master's wife will not want him to be her son-in-law." He had just learned the "Solitary Yang Finger" from his Martial Uncle, now was a good time to test it, he said, "Since he wants to pretend that he is a hero, I'll let him show off and then make him lose face." He stood up and poured two cups of wine; he went over to Yang Guo and said, "Brother Yang, you must be proud of yourself regarding these last few years. I give you a toast."

When Yang Guo saw Wu Xiuwen coming towards him, he had seen him glancing over at Guo Fu incessantly and his face had a sly look, showing that he didn't have any good intentions. He thought, "He's come over here to give a toast, he must be up to something. But he wouldn't dare put poison in the wine." So he stood up and received the wine, he said, "Thank you." He drank the wine in one gulp.

Just at this moment, Wu Xiuwen stretched out his index finger and touched Yang Guo's waist. He turned his body to block the view of others, he had sealed Yang Guo's 'Laughing Waist' pressure point, according to his Marshal Uncle, if you use the "Solitary Yang Finger" to seal an enemy's 'Laughing Waist' pressure point, the opponent will laugh and call out. If the pressure point is unsealed, the opponent will keep on laughing without stopping.

Yang Guo had already put his body on guard, how could he fall for the surprise attack? With Yang Guo's present skills, he would never be ambushed by his opponent's surprise attack. With Yang Guo's temper, normally he would not take this ill intent and would definitely counterattack fiercely. If he hadn't caught Wu Xiuwen out then he would have sealed Wu Xiuwen's 'Laughing Waist' pressure point instead. But

after having that conversation with Huang Rong, he was feeling happy and relaxed, he thought, "Although there is some animosity between us, you are still Uncle and Auntie Guo's disciple, I won't mess around with you." He secretly circulated the internal energy that Ouyang Feng had taught him, in a flash all his bodies' veins circulated the opposite way, all his pressure points changed places, but because he wasn't upside down and he didn't have much experience with this type of kung fu. After one inhalation and one exhalation, his body reverted back to normal; he needed to circulate his internal energy again to reverse his veins. But this short period of time it was enough to render Wu Xiuwen's attack useless.

Wu Xiuwen saw that after touching his pressure point, Yang Guo had a little smile on his face, he was still sitting in his original position and there was no reaction from him. He was surprised and returned to his table. He quietly said, "Brother, how come the kung fu that Martial Uncle taught us doesn't work?" Wu Xiuwen told him what had just happened.

Wu Dunru chuckled and said, "Your stance must have been wrong or you've pointed to the wrong place."

Wu Xiuwen quickly said, "What's wrong? Take a look." He raised his finger and then pointed to his brother's waist; the appearance, stance and strength were exactly the same as the method that his Martial Uncle taught him.

Guo Fu's lips pursed and she said, "I thought that the "Solitary Yang Finger" was something amazing, huh! It doesn't look like its much use." She knew that the Wu brothers had learned the "Solitary Yang Finger" but she herself didn't know it. She knows that they will definitely teach her eventually, she still had a feeling of unhappiness in her.

Wu Dunru stood up and poured two cups of wine, he went over to Yang Guo and said, "Brother Yang, me and my brother haven't seen you for many years, now we meet again, junior also presents a toast to you."

Yang Guo laughed in his heart and thought, "Your little brother has already shown his skills, let's see what other great skills you have as the elder brother." He was holding up a piece of beef with his chopstick and didn't put it down; he stretched out his left arm to take the cup and laughed, "Thank you."

Wu Dunru didn't try to hide it, he stretched out his right arm, his sleeve carried a gust of wind, he stretched out his finger to seal the pressure point on Yang Guo's waist. Yang Guo saw that the finger was coming in fiercely, his kung fu of reversing his veins was limited and he was afraid that he would not be able to block this attack. He dropped his arm and used the slab of beef to protect his 'Laughing Waist' pressure point. This move started second but arrived first, Wu Dunru did not notice this, and his finger went forward and pierced the slab of beef. Yang Guo placed his chopsticks down and said, "After drinking wine, it would be best to follow it with a slab of beef." Wu Dunru raised his hand and saw his five fingers holding onto a large piece of beef, its juice dripping everywhere, he couldn't hold onto it but couldn't fling it away, he gave a furious stare at Yang Guo and scurried back to his seat. Guo Fu saw that he was holding a piece of beef, it was very strange and she asked, "What's that?"

Wu Dunru's face turned red, he couldn't reply. Just at this time, the Beggar Clan's new chief Lu Youjiao raised a cup and stood up. He gave a toast to all the heroes and then clearly said, "Our clan's Chief Hong Lao has passed on an order, and he said that the Mongols are invading south and commanded all our clan members to defend our country

against them with our lives. All the heroes of the world are gathered here today, everyone here has loyalty in their hearts, we need to discuss the situation and come up with a plan that will drive the Mongols away, never to come back to the land of the Song.”

After he finished, all the heroes stood up, a word here and there, everyone had the same thought. Most of the heroes that attended this feast are patriots, when they saw that their country was close to danger, they all were worried, and now someone has raised this issue, all the loyal and patriotic heroes responded.

A silver bearded old man stood up, his voice was like a bell as he said, “There’s a saying, ‘A snake without a head will not move’, we have loyalty in our hearts but without a leader we will not be able to accomplish our goals. Today, most of the world’s heroes are here; we need to elect a worthy, revered and respected hero who will take charge and lead us.”

A lot of them shouted out, someone called out, “Let the Senior take charge!” “There is no need to elect someone else!”

The old man laughed and said, “What sort of class does a rotten old man such as I belong to? The great fighters of Wulin have always been Eastern Heretic, Western Poison, Southern Emperor, Northern Beggar and Central Divinity. Central Divinity Elder Chongyang had passed away long ago, Eastern Heretic Island Master Huang does as he pleases by himself, Western Poison does not belong to our group; Southern Emperor is far away in Dali and is not a Song citizen. Only Northern Beggar senior Hong Lao can be the Chancellor of all the heroes here.” Hong Qigong is one of Wulin’s most eminent men, everyone agreed to this and started to clap, no one had any other suggestions.

A voice from the crowd said, "Of course Chief Hong Lao can be the Chancellor of the heroes here. Apart from him, is there another who is as skilled, as revered and has the ability to take on such an important position?"

The voice was clear; everyone looked in the direction of the voice but didn't see anyone. Actually, it was a very short person who had spoke out and was covered by the others around him. Someone asked, "Who said that?" The short man leaped on the table. He was about three feet tall, over forty years of age; his face exuded a serious air. A few of the crowd knew that he was a good man of Jiangxi, 'Short Lion' Lei Meng. The crowd wanted to laugh but when they saw his fierce eyes, they swallowed their laughter.

They heard him continue, "But Chief Hong Lao goes and comes as he pleases; over the last ten years he has only shown himself once. But when we discuss the important matter of defending against the enemy, but have no way to call on him, what should we do then?"

Everyone thought, "What he said does make sense."

Lei Meng said, "Everything we are doing today is for protecting our country, not for ourselves. We will elect a Vice Chancellor; since Chancellor Hong Lao is roaming around the lands, we will follow the Vice Chancellor's orders."

In the midst of shouts and applause, someone called out, "Guo Jing Hero Guo!" Someone else called out, "Chief Lu is the best candidate." Another person said, "The previous Beggar Clan chief is wise and clever, and she is the disciple of Chief Hong Lao, I elect Chief Huang." Someone called out, "Let the present Master Lu..." Another one called out, "The Quanzhen sect leader Ma Yu. The "Eternal Spring" Elder Qiu..." Everyone discussed this. In this chaos, four

people quickly entered the main hall; it was Hao Datong, Sun Bu'Er, Zhao Zhijing and Yin Zhiping.

When Yang Guo saw they had returned he thought, "Huh, you want to go another round with me?" Guo Jing and Lu Guanying were delighted; they left their table to meet them. The Quanzhen sect is famous for its orthodox martial arts, if there were not any skilled fighters from Quanzhen attending today's 'Heroes Feast', of course their reputation will be tarnished. Hao Datong whispered into Guo Jing's ear, "There is an enemy coming to cause trouble, be careful. We have come back especially to bring this news."

Guo Jing pondered, the "Blithe Elder" Hao Datong is one of the skilled fighters of Quanzhen, there aren't many people in the world of Jianghu with better skills than him; he trembled slightly as he said these words, the enemy must be extremely powerful, he quietly asked, "Ouyang Feng?"

Hao Datong said, "No, it is the Mongol that I've suffered from before."

Guo Jing searched his mind and nodded, "Its Prince Huo Dou?" Before Hao Datong could reply, the sound of a horn blowing was heard outside.

Lu Guanying called out, "Greet the guest!" As soon as he finished, tens of people short and tall stood at the front of the hall.

There many heroes that were eating and drinking happily in the hall and all were slightly surprised when they saw these people suddenly enter, but they assumed that these people had come to attend the 'Heroes Feast'. They didn't see anyone they knew and didn't take much notice.

Guo Jing passed on this news to Huang Rong, the both of them stood up and along with the Lu couple, they went out

to meet the visitors. Guo Jing knew the elegant and prosperous looking Mongolian Prince Huo Dou; the sharp faced and skinny Tibetan monk was Huo Dou's apprentice brother Da'erba. Guo Jing had met the two before; though the two were extremely good fighters, their skills were below his, there was no need for him to be alarmed. He saw the two standing away from each other, a person in a red gown walked forward; the person was extremely tall and skinny. It was a Tibetan monk who looked like a bamboo tree; there was a groove on his head, like a plate. Guo Jing and Huang Rong glanced at each other. Huang Yaoshi had told them about the martial arts of the secret school of western Tibet before. When one has reached an extremely high level, the person's head will have a groove. This person has a very deep groove; could it be that this person's skills are extremely high? How come they had never heard about such a highly skilled fighter from the Western Tibet Jianghu world? The both of them were on guard. They bowed to greet the visitors at the same time.

Guo Jing said, "Everyone has come from afar, come in and have a few drinks." He knew that they were the enemy and didn't use any fake pleasantries. Lu Guanying ordered his servants to set up another table. The Wu brothers have always helped their Master and Master's wife in general affairs. They directed the servants and arranged for a table to be placed at the best position. They kept on apologizing to the guests as they did this and asked them to move their seats.

Guo Fu saw Yang Guo was sitting there comfortably without moving; she didn't like this one bit and thought, "You count as a hero? When all the world's heroes die, it still won't be your turn." She made a signal to Wu Xiuwen with her eyes and then mouthed in the direction of Yang Guo. Wu Xiuwen understood, he went over to Yang Guo and said, "Brother

Yang, you need to move your seat a little.” He didn’t wait for his reaction and instructed the servants to move his cup and chopsticks to the table in the furthest corner in the room. Yang Guo’s temper started to flare up, but he didn’t say anything and just chuckled to himself.

Prince Huo Dou said to the tall Tibetan monk, “Master, I’ll introduce you to the two most famous heroes in the central plains.”

Guo Jing was alarmed, “So he’s the Mongolian Prince’s master.”

The monk nodded, his eyes seemed to be open but also appeared to be closed. Prince Huo Dou said, “That person has been Mongolia’s Western Levy Right General Guo Jing...Hero Guo, and that is Mrs. Guo, she is the Beggar Clan’s Chief Huang.”

When the monk heard the words ‘Mongolia’s Western Levy Right General’ he suddenly opened his eyes and looked around, He took a look at Guo Jing’s face and then his eyes half closed again, he didn’t take the Beggar Clan’s Chief to heart.

Prince Huo Dou said clearly, “This is my mentor, the holy monk of Western Tibet; everyone calls him Jinlun Fawang. The reigning Mongolian Queen has assigned him the title of the First Protector of Mongolia.” Those words were said very clearly; all the heroes that were present heard everything he said. The crowd was stunned and looked at each other thinking, “We are here discussing the Mongols invading the South, where on earth did this Protector of Mongolia come from?”

Yang Guo was even more alarmed, he remembered how Hong Qigong and his Godfather praised the kung fu the ‘Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border’, calling it terrific. They

told them to tell their Grandmaster to come down and have a duel. Right now both Jinlun Fawang and the master of the 'Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border' Da'erba are here, while his Godfather and Hong Qigong have both passed away, he was sad. He knew that this tall and skinny Tibetan monk must be extraordinary.

Guo Jing didn't know how to confront these people, he just said calmly, "You have come from afar, please have a few drinks."

After three rounds of wine, Prince Huo Dou stood up and opened his fan, revealing a delicate and beautiful peony flower; he said with a clear voice, "We have not received a 'Heroes' invitation but we have come here to attend the 'Heroes Feast'. We are uninvited guests, but when I considered all the worthy and admirable people that would be gathered here, I had to take the risk. The gathering of the world's heroes is a rare event. In my opinion, a chancellor needs to be elected who will organize the Wulin world in the interests of the worlds' heroes, what does everyone think?"

'Short Lion' Lei Meng said loudly, "What you said is not wrong. We have already elected the Beggar Clan's Chief Hong Lao as our chancellor, now we are in the middle of the electing a vice chancellor, what are your views?"

Huo Dou chuckled, "Hong Qigong had passed away a long time ago. By electing a spirit as a chancellor, do you treat us all as dead people?" As he said this, all the heroes made a clamor, the Beggar Clan members were especially angry, all were shouting.

Huo Dou said, "Fine, if Hong Qigong isn't dead, then please invite him here."

Lu Youjiao raised the Dog Beating Stick twice and said, "Chief Hong Lao is roaming the world; he never stays in one place. How can you see him so easily?"

Huo Dou chuckled, "Without mentioning the fact that it isn't clear whether Hong Qigong is alive or dead, and even if he was alive and were sitting here, with his martial arts and virtue, how could he compare with my master Jinlun Fawang?" All the heroes of the world listened. "Apart from my master Jinlun Fawang; there isn't a second person who can take the position of the Chancellor of Wulin."

When the crowd heard these words, they all knew the reason these people had come here. They knew that the 'Heroes Feast' would not be in the best interests of Mongolia and so came here to compete for the place of Wulin's Chancellor. If Jinlun Fawang manages to take the place of Chancellor by virtue of his kung fu, the heroes of the central plains will of course ignore his orders. But the Han defensive force against the Mongols would have been severely weakened.

Everyone knew that Huang Rong was wise and ingenious; they all turned their heads and looked at her, thinking, "Even if these people's kung fu was a lot stronger, they will never be a match for the few thousands of us that are here. Whether it is one on one or a mass brawl, we won't lose. Everyone just listen to Chief Huang's instructions."

Huang Rong knew that today's matters would not be settled unless martial arts were used. A mass brawl will of course result in victory but the opposition will not be convinced. She said clearly, "Right now, all the heroes here have elected Hong Qigong to be the Chancellor of Wulin. This Mongolian gentleman has another suggestion and wants to elect a person that no one here has heard of or seen; someone called Jinlun Fawang. If Hong Qigong were here,

then they both could show their divine skills and duel to a result, but senior is roaming the world and enjoying life. Killing Mongols and getting rid of our country's traitors, he didn't predict that today you would come here by your own choice. He isn't here to greet you; when he hears of this news later on, he would definitely regret his absence. Luckily, Hong Qigong and Jinlun Fawang both have disciples, why don't we let the disciples represent their masters in this exchange?"

Most of the heroes of the central plains knew that Guo Jing's skills were terrifyingly good and now in the prime of his life, he could be said to be the world's number one fighter. Even if Hong Qigong came out right now, he might not be stronger than him. If he fights with the disciple of Jinlun Fawang, victory is certain, there is no way for him lose. Everyone called out and shouted loudly, shaking the tiles of the roof. When those in the side halls and back hall heard this news, they all rushed over. The front and back courtyard, the entrances to the room were full of people, everyone calling out to help enforce this suggestion. The numbers on Jinlun Fawang's side were small, their voices could not compete.

Years ago, Huo Dou had been defeated by Guo Jing in one stance. He thought that Guo Jing was a disciple of Quanzhen's sect; after that he looked into who he was and found out about his background. His apprentice brother Da'erba and he were afraid that even if the two of them went up at once, they would most probably lose to this disciple of Hong Qigong, Hero Guo. But if they didn't follow Huang Rong's suggestion, they would not be able to challenge for the position of Wulin's Chancellor. This change of events really was unexpected and they couldn't think of a way to respond.

Jinlun Fawang said, "Fine, Huo Dou, go ahead and compete with the disciple of Hong Qigong." Those words were extremely heavy, he said this all in one breath without a need to breathe in again. He had always lived in Western Tibet and thought that with Huo Dou's martial arts, he would have little competition in the central plains. The only people that he wouldn't be able to beat are the likes of seniors such as Northern Beggar, Eastern Heretic, and Western Poison. He didn't know that he had lost to Guo Jing before.

Huo Dou agreed but then quietly said, "Master, that disciple of Hong Qigong is amazing, this disciple is afraid that he will not be able to achieve victory. I do not want to tarnish Master's name."

Jinlun Fawang's face sank, and said, "Could it be that you can't beat someone else's disciple? Go now."

Huo Dou was in a very embarrassing situation; he had kept the matter of losing to Guo Jing away from his master. Right now he didn't dare to tell him about it in this final moment. He knew that his master has the ability to go through heaven and penetrate earth; he had no match under heaven. He thought that all that they had to do was to hurry to the 'Heroes Feast' and the position of Wulin's Chancellor will be in their hands. How could he have guessed that he would have to fight with Guo Jing? In this urgent situation, a fat man dressed in the clothes of a Mongolian official went over to him and whispered a few words into his ear. As soon as Huo Dou heard this he was delighted, he stood up and opened his fan, fluttering it a few times before he said clearly, "I have heard that the Beggar Clan has a treasured martial art, its called the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" or something; it is Chief Hong Lao's most powerful skill. Little Prince is brazen; I'll rely on my fan to break this skill. If I

break this skill, then it appears the martial arts of Hong Qigong are merely mediocre!”

At first, when Huang Rong saw someone whispering into Huo Dou’s ear, she didn’t take it to heart; suddenly she heard him mentioning the “Dog Beating Stick Technique”. In just a few words he had placed their most powerful fighter Guo Jing to one side; who exactly came up with this plan? She took a look at that Mongolian and then it became clear; she recognized that it was one of four elders of the Beggar Clan Elder Peng. So he has gone over to the Mongols; he is now wearing Mongolian clothes and has grown a beard. His hat hung down, covering his eyes and if she hadn’t studied him carefully, she would not have been able to recognize him. Only he would know that the “Dog Beating Stick Technique” is passed on from chief to chief only; though Guo Jing’s skills are high, he doesn’t know this set of kung fu. These words were deliberately aimed to challenge Huang Rong and Lu Youjiao.

Lu Youjiao had just started to learn the “Dog Beating Stick Technique”, his understanding is limited and may not be able to use it; she herself will have to fight.

Guo Jing knew that his wife’s “Dog Beating Stick Technique” is ingenious; it would be able to beat Huo Dou. But in the past few months, her baby’s chi had moved, her body was not in tune, she cannot fight with someone else; so he got out of his seat and stood between the tables and said, “Chief Hong Lao has never used his “Dog Beating Stick Technique”, come and experience his “Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms”.”

Jinlun Fawang’s eyes half opened and half closed, he saw Guo Jing moving out of his seat and standing up, he had an extraordinary air about him. He couldn’t stop himself from

being secretly alarmed, “This person really is extraordinary.”

Huo Dou laughed and said, “At Chongyang Palace in Mount Zhongnan, we met once before; that day, you said that you are under the tutelage of Ma Yu, Qiu Chu Ji and the other Taoists; why are you now calling yourself a disciple of Hong Qigong’s?”

Guo Jing was about to reply when Huo Dou continued, “A person having many masters is a common thing. Today, it is an exchange of kung fu between Jinlun Fawang and Hong Qigong; though your kung fu is great, your skills come from a variety of schools, you cannot show Hong Qigong’s real abilities.”

His argument made some sense; Guo Jing was clumsy with words and had no way to rebuke.

The crowd all called out, “If you’ve got guts, then fight with hero Guo, if you haven’t scurry away with your tail hanging behind you.” “Hero Guo is Hong Qigong’s disciple, if he doesn’t qualify, then who can represent Hong Qigong?” “First suffer under the “Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms”, you’ll still have time to experience the “Dog Beating Stick Technique”.”

Huo Dou laughed towards the sky, as he laughed he circulated his internal energy, ‘ha’ ‘ha’ ‘ha’ ‘ha’, ‘he’ ‘he’ ‘he’ ‘he’; he drowned out the clamor made by the heroes; his voice shaking the flames of the candles in the hall. The heroes looked at each other, their faces losing color, they thought, “Who would have thought that such a young man, who looks like a well to do person, have such strong internal energy.” In a flash, it had become quiet.

Huo Dou said to Jinlun Fawang, “Master, we have allowed ourselves to be wronged by these people. At first, when we

heard that today is the 'Heroes Feast', we rushed to attend from thousands of li away, but who knew that these people are cowards. Let's go quickly, if you unluckily become the Chancellor of these people, it'll make our people say that you are in the same league as these people, won't that tarnish your great name?"

The heroes all knew that he was trying to anger them, wanting to force Huang Rong to come out and battle; but his words were extremely infuriating, it really was difficult for anyone to endure them.

In the midst of these shouts and calls from the crowd, Lu Youjiao showed his bamboo stick and walked forward, standing between the tables. He said, "I am the newly appointed Beggar Clan Chief Lu Youjiao, I have only learnt less than ten percent of the "Dog Beating Stick Technique", I actually shouldn't use it. But if you insist on tasting the pain of the "Dog Beating Stick Technique", I'll beat you with a few stances."

Lu Youjiao's martial arts was already profound, though he hadn't learned all of the "Dog Beating Stick Technique", it had improved his martial arts a significant level. He saw that Huo Dou was around thirty years of age; he thought that even with a great teacher, his internal energy will not be profound. He saw that Huang Rong wasn't well, whether he wins or loses, he couldn't let her take the risk.

Huo Dou just wanted to ensure that he would not have to fight Guo Jing; he wasn't afraid of anyone else and immediately held his hand and bowed, he said, "Chief Lu, nice to meet you. There's no one better to exchange moves with than you."

Huang Rong was secretly anxious, but she remembered that Lu Youjiao was the newly appointed chief; since he had

made the challenge she couldn't stop him. Otherwise she will question Lu Youjiao's clout and show that her power is above the chief's; she had to allow him to fight for a while and then decide what to do afterwards.

The managers of the Lu Manor instructed the servants to move the tables, creating seven or eight tables' worth of space and added more red candles, lighting up the centre of the hall as if it were daytime.

Hou Dou called out, "Ready!" As he said this his fan swept across, a gust of wind threw itself towards Lu Youjiao, carrying a slight fragrance. Lu Youjiao was afraid that the wind carried poison and quickly darted out of the way of the wind. Huo Dou's fan waved out, a 'ca' sound was heard; the fan folded and formed an eight-inch long pressure point sealing stick, and was thrust towards the enemy's side. Lu Youjiao's bamboo stick went forward, he ignored the threat of having his pressure point sealed and used the 'coil' formulae to trip and lift. The "Dog Beating Stick Technique" really was extremely ingenious, its direction is extremely difficult to predict; Huo Dou lightly leapt up to avoid this but he couldn't have guessed that the stick would suddenly flip up fiercely and would hit his lower leg. He stumbled, leaped forward three steps and stopped himself from falling down.

The watching heroes all cheered and called out, "The dog's been hit!" "This will teach you the power of the "Dog Beating Stick Technique"!"

Huo Dou's face turned red immediately after this, he gracefully turned around and threw out a left palm. Lu Youjiao kicked out his left leg and swept with bamboo stick, the stick was in a flying dance, it kept on changing without stop.

Huo Dou was secretly alarmed, "The "Dog Beating Stick Technique" does live up to its name!" He concentrated and used all his strength with the fan in his right hand and palm with his left. Lu Youjiao has yet to complete the final stage of the stick technique, he had victory in his grasp many times but in the end it was a waste of his efforts. Guo Jing and Huang Rong watched from the side and kept on saying to themselves, "What a pity!"

After another ten stances or so, the weaknesses in Lu Youjiao's "Dog Beating Stick Technique" began to show themselves. Yang Guo saw every stance clearly and couldn't stop himself from frowning. Luckily the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" name is famous, and as soon as it was used, Huo Dou was struck in the lower leg. Huo Dou was worried and didn't dare get too close, otherwise Lu Youjiao would have lost long ago. Huang Rong saw that something was wrong and was about to call out and tell Lu Youjiao to come back when Lu Youjiao suddenly used a stance of "Hitting the Dog's Back from the Side", the bamboo stick flashed across and struck Huo Dou's left cheek. But his stance was too heavy; the lightness of the skill was lost. Huo Dou suddenly stretched out his hand and held the bamboo stick in his hand, he had no more worries and suddenly threw out a palm that struck Lu Youjiao in the chest and then followed it by a sweep, a 'ka la' sound was heard as Lu Youjiao's leg was broken. He spat out a pool of blood as he fell forwards. Two seven band members dashed forward to support him. When everyone saw how ruthless Huo Dou was, they were extremely angry and they all shouted and cursed.

Hou Dou displayed the gem green jade bamboo stick; he was proud of himself and said, "The Beggar Clan's treasure is the Dog Beating Stick, so it's nothing more than this." He wanted to insult the central plain's largest heroic clan. He

held the Dog Beating Stick in his two hands and wanted to snap it in half.

Suddenly a green image flashed, an elegant and beautiful young woman stood in front of him, she said, "Wait!" It was Huang Rong.

Huo Dou saw that her movements were extremely fast and was in shock, all he could say was, "You..." Her left hand swept across and her right hand scoured across his eyes. Huo Dou quickly stretched his arm out but by that time, Huang Rong had already snatched the Dog Beating Stick back. This stance of snatching the stick back is called, "Snatching the Stick from the Dog's Mouth" and is one of the extremely advanced stances of the "Dog Beating Stick Technique". Years ago at the Mount Jun Beggar Clan gathering, Huang Rong used this technique to snatch the Dog Beating Stick away from Yang Kang three times. The changes of this stance are extremely mysterious; when snatching the stick in a hundred ways there would be one hundred successes, even a stronger opponent cannot avoid this.

All the heroes cheered. Huang Rong returned to her seat with the Dog Beating Stick by her side, leaving Huo Dou in the middle of the room in an embarrassing situation. Though his martial arts were profound, he couldn't explain how Huang Rong snatched the stick away, he thought, "Could it be that this woman knows how to perform illusions?" He heard the onlookers ridiculing him; he glanced at his master and saw his face was not pleased. He thought that such a beautiful woman must have limited abilities so he called out, "Chief Huang, I have handed the Dog Beating Stick back to you, please come and exchange a few moves. You won't dare turn this invitation down will you?" As soon as he said this, indeed there were people who thought that it wasn't Huang Rong who had snatched back

the Dog Beating Stick, but it was Huo Dou who handed it back to her so they can duel. Only people with high martial arts could see that it was Huang Rong who had used force to take the Dog Beating Stick back.

When Guo Fu heard these words she was extremely angry, in her life she had never seen anyone who dared treat her mother with such disrespect. A 'shua' sound was heard as she took out her precious sword. Wu Xiuwen said, "Sister Fu, I'll help you vent your anger." Wu Dunru also had the same thought, the two of them leapt into the heart of the main hall at the same time.

One of them said, "My Master's wife's body is very precious."

The other one said, "How can she fight with a ruffian like you."

The other said, "First experience little Master's kung fu first before doing anything else."

Huo Dou saw that the two were young but their movements were steady, they have been taught by famous masters, he thought, "We have come here today to show off our martial arts and break the spirits of the Han martial artists, fighting a few more rounds will be great. But there are many of them and few of us, if we induce a brawl, things would be hard to handle." So he said, "All the world's heroes listen, these two little punks want to duel with me, if I do fight then I'm afraid that people will say I'm bullying them. If I don't I'm afraid that people will think that I'm afraid of them. Let's do it this way, we will agree to compete for three rounds, whichever side wins two rounds, then the place of Chancellor goes to them. The fight between Elder Lu and me does not count, we will start again. Does

everyone agree?" Those words were said with his status in mind, displaying his great generosity.

Guo Jing, Huang Rong and all the special guests discussed this quietly; they felt that it would be difficult to reject this suggestion. Today, apart from Huang Rong who cannot come out and fight, the strongest people here are Guo Jing, Hao Datong and Reverend Yideng's fourth disciple Zhu Ziliu. Zhu Ziliu is a citizen of Dali but he still had ties to this matter. Dali and Song depended on each other, and in the recent years Dali has suffered the oppression of Mongols; it could be said that they shared the same enemy. Never mind the fact that he had a very good friendship with the Guo couple, he was duty bound to help. They decided that Zhu Ziliu would battle with Huo Dou in the first round, Hao Datong with Da'erba in the second, Guo Jing and Jinlun Fawang in the final round. Whether or not this plan would assure victory was uncertain; suppose Jinlun Fawang's martial arts are so high that even Guo Jing can't withstand him. It wouldn't be inconceivable that they would lose all three rounds, and if that happens they would really have suffered a crushing defeat. Before the decision was definite, Huang Rong suddenly said, "I have a way to guarantee victory."

Guo Jing was delighted and was just about to ask her when suddenly wind sounds created by weapons could be heard, everyone turned their heads and saw the Wu brothers using their long swords fighting with Huo Dou and his fan. The Guo couple and the disciples of Reverend Yideng Dianchang Yuyin and Zhu Ziliu were worried about their safety so all of them concentrated on the battle.

The Wu brothers heard Huo Dou was rude towards them in his words, calling them little punks, these words were heard by everyone, how could they live this down? Never mind the fact that they just saw their Master's wife snatch

the bamboo stick back from him. They thought that although he beat Lu Youjiao, it was because Lu Youjiao's kung fu wasn't up to scratch, not because that this person is terrific. They also thought that since they both had been taught great martial arts by Guo Jing, if one of them can't beat him the two of them will definitely be able to overcome him. They didn't care about competing over three or four rounds, they really were like newborn calves that were not afraid of tigers, the brothers signaled with their eyes and thrust out their swords together.

However, though Guo Jing's martial arts were high, he had yet to pass on most of his skills to his disciples. He himself understood the theories of advanced martial arts but when he was passing it on, he wasn't able to express clearly its meanings. The Wu brother's natural endowments were just average to normal, how much could they learn in just a few years? In just a few moves, their long swords were controlled by Hou Dou; they were unable to use them fully. Hou Dou wanted to show off in front of these people, he saw Wu Xiuwen's sword coming in and threw up his left index finger holding up the sword on the flat side, the fan waved across and the base struck the top of the blade, a 'zheng' sound was heard as the sword snapped in two. The Wu brothers were shocked, Wu Xiuwen quickly leapt out of the way, Wu Dunru was afraid that his brother would be hurt so he extended his sword towards Huo Dou's back forcing him to stop his attack. Huo Dou had predicted this move, he didn't turn back and folded his fan sending it backwards. The two weapons met, the fan hitting against the flat side of the sword, Huo Dou twisted his fingers around twice. Only his fingers moved but the Wu Dunru's sword followed the fan in turning around, his joints would definitely twist out of place if he didn't let go. He could only loosen his hand and let go of the sword. He leapt back and saw the sword flying

upwards, the sword glimmered in the candlelight before it fell down to the floor.

The Wu brothers were shocked and angry, although they were empty handed they were not afraid. Wu Dunru's left hand hung horizontally in the air, holding the position of a stance of "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms". Wu Xiuwen's right hand hung down, his left index finger slightly crooked; as soon as the enemy attacks he would use the "Solitary Yang Finger".

Hou Dou saw that these stances looked serious, he was wary and didn't dare to look lightly upon them, he thought, "Winning up to this point is enough, there is no need to refuse something good, asking for more is not in my interests." The "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms" and "Solitary Yang Finger" are first class skills in the world of martial arts, though the Wu brothers' internal energy was weak, the stances they put out were perfect. When normal people saw it they didn't think much of it, but in the trained eyes of Huo Dou, he knew that it wasn't that simple, he laughed and then bowed with his hands, he said, "Please sit down, we are just trying to find a winner, not fighting to the death." His tone sounded a lot more polite.

The Wu brothers' faces showed signs of embarrassment; they knew that fighting empty handed with him will most probably result in an even more embarrassing defeat. The two of them hung their heads with a gloomy expression and retreated to the side, but not going back to where Guo Fu was. Guo Fu dashed forward and called out, "Wu Brothers, the three of us will go up and fight him again." The crowd looked on. Guo Fu's right hand held her sword and her left hand waved out, she said, "We three, apprentice brother and sister, will go up together."

Guo Jing shouted, "Fu'er, stop making trouble!" Guo Jing was the person that Guo Fu most feared; she could only retreat a few steps and stare angrily at Huo Dou. Huo Dou saw that she was beautiful and desirable, he laughed as he nodded his head. Guo Fu gave him a glance and turned her head away, ignoring him. The Wu brothers were really frightened that Guo Fu would ridicule them, now they saw her shielding them, showing care for them, they felt great comfort in their hearts.

Huo Dou opened his fan and fluttered it a few times and then said, "Of course that last battle does not count. Hero Guo, the three people from our side will be my master, my apprentice brother and I. My kung fu is the weakest; I'll be in the first round. Who have you elected to fight? Whoever wins or loses, it is now not a game."

Guo Jing heard that his wife had a plan for a guaranteed victory; he knew that she was cunning and intelligent and had hundreds of ideas. Though he didn't know what ingenious plan she had in mind he had great confidence in her and said loudly, "Fine, we will decide this over three rounds."

Huo Dou knew that the strongest person on the opposite side was Guo Jing, his master has no match on earth, he will definitely beat him. Though Huang Rong used a strange move to take the stick back, judging from her delicate and apprehensive appearance if she really fought she may not be that strong. The others don't even need any consideration, his eyes swept across the crowd and then said, "If anyone has another suggestion then please express it now. Once victory is decided, then the orders of the Wulin Chancellor must be followed."

The heroes wanted to agree but they had seen him defeat Lu Youjiao and the Wu brothers one after the other

sparingly; they didn't know what other abilities he hadn't shown yet, none of them dared to interrupt and all turned their heads towards the Guo couple. Huang Rong said, "You are competing in the first round, your apprentice brother in the second, your master in the third, that's decided and won't change right?"

Huo Dou said, "That is correct."

Huang Rong said quietly to those around her, "Our victory is assured."

Guo Jing said, "How?"

Huang Rong said quietly, "Now, the king wins when the third class 'si' (team of four horses) competes against his first class 'si'." After she said this she looked at Zhu Ziliu. Zhu Ziliu laughed as he continued quietly, "Beat the king by using first class 'si' against his second class 'si'; beat the king by using middle class 'si' against his third class 'si'. The result of these races was that Tain Ji lost the first one but won the last two and received a thousand gold bars from the king." Guo Jing looked blank; he didn't understand what they were talking about. Huang Rong whispered into his ear and said, "You're well versed in military techniques, have you forgotten the ingenious plan of the ancestor of military strategies Sun Bin?"

Guo Jing immediately remembered the times when he read 'Wu Mu Yi Shu' (a book containing military strategies) when he was younger; Huang Rong had told him a story; Qi's general Tain Ji and the King of Qi had a horse race, the stake was a thousand gold bars. Sun Bin taught Tian Ji a method that would guarantee victory; use his third class horses to compete against the King of Qi's first class horses, use his first class horses against King of Qi's second class horses, use his second class horses against the king of Qi's

third class horses. The result was two wins and a loss, winning the thousand gold bars. Now, Huang Rong was using this idea.

Huang Rong said, "Apprentice brother Zhu, with your "Solitary Yang Finger", beating that Mongolian Prince is not a hard thing to do."

Years ago, Zhu Ziliu had been a lawyer and a governor in Dali; he was an educated and intelligent man. The martial arts of the school of the Mu Li Duan's rely on one's understanding. When Zhu Ziliu first entered the tutelage of the Southern Emperor, his kung fu was the worst out of the four disciples 'Fisherman, Woodsman, Farmer, Scholar'; ten years later he moved up to second place, now his martial arts were much higher than his three older apprentice brothers. Reverend Yideng treated his four disciples equally, he taught them all the same kung fu; in the end it was Zhu Ziliu who had understood the most, especially the "Solitary Yang Finger", he had refined it to a superb state. Right now his kung fu could not compare with Guo Jing, Ma Yu and Qiu Chu Ji but he was better than Wang Chuyi, Hao Datong and the others.

When Guo Jing heard his wife say this he interrupted, "Asking Taoist Hao to fight Jinlun Fawang may be a bit too risky. If the victory or loss won't affect the overall result, then I'm afraid during that round the enemy might too be ruthless, it would be difficult to defend against him." He spoke frankly and didn't care that he counted as the first class 'si', regarding Hao Datong as the third class 'si' may be a bit too impolite.

Hao Datong knew that this duel will affect the fate of the country; this was not the normal duels for fame that occurs frequently in the world of Wulin. If the position of the Chancellor of Wulin is taken by the Mongolian Protector,

not only will the Han martial artists lose face, they will also lose their spirit. The goal of uniting together and fighting against the invaders will be unachievable, he said, "There is no need to worry about that, as long as it'll help my country, losing my life to that Tibetan monk is not important."

Huang Rong said, "All we need to do is to win the first two matches, then there will be no need for the third match." Guo Jing was delighted and agreed.

Zhu Ziliu laughed and said, "I have an important mission; if I lost to that Mongolian Prince then I'd suffer a lifetime of insults from the world's heroes."

Huang Rong said, "There's no need to be modest, please go ahead."

Zhu Ziliu went to the middle of the hall and saluted Huo Dou with his hands and said, "In the first match, it will be me who'll be asking for some advice. My surname is Zhu first names Ziliu; the things that I love most in life are poetry and literature, my kung fu is very coarse. I have come to request some pointers from you." As he said this he searched himself, from his sleeve he took out a pen, he circled it a few times in the air, looking completely like a scholar.

Huo Dou thought, "These types of people will have profound skills, I cannot take it easy." He held his fists and returned the greeting and said, "Little Prince requests pointers from senior, please show your weapon."

Zhu Ziliu said, "Mongolians are a barbaric nation, they have yet to be enlightened, since you want some pointers, then I will point you in the right direction."

Huo Dou was furious, "You insult my country; then I can't spare you." He opened his fan and said, "This is my weapon,

are you going to use a saber or a sword?"

Zhu Ziliu wrote the word 'pen' in the air and laughed as he said, "In my life I have always been associated with a pen; how would I know how to use other weapons?"

Huo Dou concentrated on his pen, he saw the bamboo tube and the brush head, at the tip of the pen was half an inch of black ink, there was nothing special about it. It was completely different to the 'chun gang' pen that people in Wulin used for sealing pressure points, he was about to ask about it when a girl in white entered from outside.

She stood at the entrance of the hall, her eyes slowly scoured across the crowd; it was as if she was looking for someone. Everyone in the hall was concentrating on Zhu Ziliu and Huo Dou when the girl in white entered; they turned their heads involuntarily and looked at her. They saw her face was pale white as if she was ill; though the light of the candles was like red clouds, her face had no hint of blood in it, showing off her elegance even further, her beauty was incomparable. People use the phrase 'as beautiful as a goddess' to describe a girl's beauty but no one knew how beautiful a goddess was. As soon as these people saw this girl, they couldn't stop the words 'as beautiful as a goddess' from running through their minds. It was as if a light fog, a thin mist, surrounded her body; she appeared real but also looked like an illusion; she was not from this world.

As soon as Yang Guo saw this young girl, he was overjoyed, his chest felt like it had been struck by a metal hammer; he leapt from the corner of the room and hugged her, he called out, "Gu Gu, Gu Gu!" That young girl was Xiao Longnu.

After she left Yang Guo, she circled around the land a few times and then returned to the ancient tomb. Before she

was eighteen, living in the ancient tomb was not hard for her, but after she met Yang Guo and experienced many twists and turns, she could never return to the way she was before, not caring about anything.

Every time she sat on the chilled jade bed to practice her martial arts she remembered that Yang Guo had slept on this bed; when she sat at the table eating she remembered the times when she ate with Yang Guo. After practicing kung fu for a little while she would become troubled and impatient, it was difficult to carry on. She spent over a month like this before she could endure it no longer; she decided to look for Yang Guo. She didn't know how she would treat him once she had found him. She didn't know anything about worldly matters, similar to a person from the mountains or wild lands, now something had suddenly changed and was unfamiliar, she was completely at a loss. After she left the mountain, everything that she saw was new to her; how would she know the roads, whenever she saw someone passing by she would ask, "Have you seen Yang Guo?" When she was hungry she would take other people's food because she didn't know that money was needed. She created a lot of trouble along the way. But when people saw that she was innocent and beautiful, they couldn't refrain from making her allowances; no one caused trouble for her. One day she heard two men talking in a restaurant, they said that the famous heroes of the world will be going to Da Xingguan's 'Heroes Feast' at the Lu Manor. She thought that Yang Guo might be there so she found out how to get there and headed for the Lu manor.

Apart from Hao Datong, Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing, no one amongst the two thousand present knew a thing about her; all they saw was that she was extremely beautiful, everyone's heart felt touched. Sun Bu'Er knew about this person but had never seen her before. Yin Zhiping's face

was pale, his body trembled. Zhao Zhijing looked at him and chuckled. Guo Jing and Huang Rong were greatly surprised with how Yang Guo reacted to her. Xiao Longnu said, "Guo'er, indeed you are here, I've finally found you."

Tears flowed from Yang Guo's eyes as he choked, "You... you won't abandon me again will you?"

Xiao Longnu shook her head and said, "I don't know."

Yang Guo said, "Where ever you go I will follow." There were over a thousand people here in the main hall but the two acted as if no one else was there, talking naturally. Xiao Longnu held Yang Guo's hand, she didn't know whether she was happy or sad.

Though Huo Dou's heart was moved when he saw Xiao Longnu, he didn't know that this was the girl whose hand in marriage he was trying to get years ago at Mount Zhongnan. He saw that Yang Guo's garments were ragged and torn but the two of them looked very close, his heart was disgusted and he said, "We are dueling, go and find another place for this!"

Yang Guo was not in the mood to talk to him, he held Xiao Longnu's hand and went over to the side and they sat down shoulder to shoulder on the rock base of a pillar. His heart was bursting with joy. Huo Dou turned around and said to Zhu Ziliu, "Since you are not using a weapon, we'll fight with our fists."

Zhu Ziliu said, "Not so. We Chinese are a polite nation, not like the barbaric Mongols. In a treaty, one uses a pen to communicate; the enemy has a pen but no saber, so who needs a weapon?"

Huo Dou said, "Since it is like this, prepare!" He opened his fan and swept it across. Zhu Ziliu slanted his body, a step to

the side and swung his head. His left hand swept lightly across himself, the pen in his right hand went towards Huo Dou's face. Huo Dou moved his head to avoid it; he saw the opponent's movements were light and his stances strange. He didn't dare to attack, waiting to see through his kung fu clearly before making a decision.

Zhu Ziliu said, "The enemy's pen can sweep away a thousand soldiers, you need to be careful." As he said this the tip of the pen went forward. Huo Dou learned martial arts in Western Tibet, Jinlun Fawang was very knowledgeable, there was nothing he didn't know about the central plains' martial arts. When Huo Dou's training was drawing to a close, he decided to go to the central plains to make his name, and so Jinlun Fawang taught him how to defeat the proudest kung fu of the central plain's most famous sects. How could he know that he would meet up with Zhu Ziliu, the weapon he used was strange, his stances were unimaginably strange, he had never heard of such things. He saw the pen tip stroking across and hooking down; it was as if he was writing but the places where the pen was pointing were the places of the body's main pressure points.

Zhu Ziliu is the number one calligrapher of the northern sky, though he practices martial arts he hadn't stopped studying literature, in the end, the more he practiced his kung fu the further refined it became and eventually the two arts became connected to each other. The "Solitary Yang Finger" and calligraphy became one. This kung fu was his own invention; if the opponent was stronger but didn't have a background in literature, it would be extremely difficult for them to defend against this martial art. From literature and literature on martial arts came a kung fu where both literature and martial arts have reached an extremely advanced state. Luckily, Huo Dou has studied

under a Han scholar when he was young, he had read books and recited poems, and was able to defend against this attack. He saw the tip of the pen flashing across, in the calligraphy was the aim of sealing pressure points, in the pressure point sealing was the aim of calligraphy. It was like a silver hook and metal scull, the strokes were swift and powerful and in the midst of this there was a leisurely and elegant air.

Guo Jing wasn't versed in literature, as he watched he thought this kung fu was extraordinary. Huang Rong's father taught her both martial arts and literature, when she saw this excellent kung fu, she couldn't stop herself from admiring and enjoying it. Guo Fu went over to her mother's side and asked, "Mother, he's holding that pen, stroking it here and there, what kind of game is that?"

Huang Rong was concentrating on the battle and just replied, "The Fang Xuan Ling Inscription."

Guo Fu didn't understand and asked, "What Fang Xuan Ling Inscription?" Huang Rong was absorbed in the battle and didn't reply.

The 'Fan Xuan Ling Inscription' is a work written by the Tang minister Chu Sui Liang, and it is also a refined calligraphy style. The people before them have judged Chu's book and likened it to 'a girl from heaven scattering flowers'; the calligraphy style was firm, graceful and elegant, concentrating on creating beauty, every stroke was airy, completely focusing on this aspect. Zhu Ziliu's "Solitary Yang Book Finger" uses a pen as the finger; every stance was measured and cautious, like a pen writing a book.

Though Huo Duo did not understand the intricacies of the "Solitary Yang Finger", at least he had read the 'Fang Xuan Ling Inscription' before, he knew that the horizontal stroke

will be followed by a vertical stroke, he defended well, and he didn't show signs of losing. Zhu Ziliu saw that he knew this style of calligraphy; he called out and shouted, "Careful! A cursive calligraphy style is coming." Suddenly he took off his hat and shot it at him, his sleeve flew across the air, and he dashed forward madly, his stances not following the style. He looked as if he were mad, crazy, drunk, as if a spell was put on him, the pen's aim raining down, the finger moving like a dragon and snake. Guo Fu was startled and laughed as she asked, "Mother, has he gone mad?"

Huang Rong said, "If he drank three cups of wine then the pen would be even better." She picked up a wine pot and poured three cups, she called out, "Brother Zhu, drink three cups to further your enjoyment." The cup was in her left hand, the middle finger of her right hand flicked it, and the wine cup flew steadily across to him.

Zhu Ziliu raised his pen and brushed down, forcing Huo Dou to the side as he caught the cup, drinking it in one go. Huang Rong flicked the second and third cup over in the same way. Huo Dou saw the two of them offering wine in the battle, not even noticing that he was there, he wanted to wave his fan and knock the cups out of the air but Huang Rong followed Zhu Ziliu's pen's intent, she flicked out the cups in the gaps. Huo Dou was unable to knock them out of the air. Zhu Ziliu drank the three cups dry and called out, "Thank you. That is very handsome "Divine Flicking Finger" kung fu!"

Huang Rong laughed and said, "Very spirited 'Zi Yan Tie'!"

Zhu Ziliu gave a laugh and thought, "I have always thought that I am clever, but I am still a level below that girl. I have studied this skill diligently for over ten years; just one look and she saw through it."

The work that he was using now was Zhang Xu's 'Tie Yin Tie' of the Tang dynasty. Zhang Xu has been given the title of 'Cao Sheng', the saint of cursive calligraphy. Du Fu's poem 'The Song of the eight drinking Immortals' says; "Zhang Xu's three cups passes onto Cao Sheng, the hat is removed showing his head in front of the king, the pen descending on the paper like a fog."

Huang Rong offered him three cups firstly to acknowledge the class of kung fu he was using, secondly, once the influence of wine increases, the calligraphy will be even better, and lastly she wanted to dampen Huo Dou's spirits. She then saw Zhu Ziliu write 'The Bold Man Fights for the Road', on the 'road' word, the pen hooked up and brushed across Huo Dou's clothes. The heroes all laughed as Huo Dou retreated backwards.

End of Chapter 12.

Chapter 13 - The Chancellor of Wulin

Translated by Noodles



Yang Guo's five fingers then gently waved out, a slight smile on his face; it was a stance of "Dressing of Li Hua" from the Jade Maiden. Yang

Guo's smile infected Da Er Ba, he followed and smiled. Yang Guo's face was handsome and striking, when he smiled, he was even more so, Da Er Ba's cheekbones were high and his cheeks deep, when the crowd saw him follow Yang Guo and smile, all of them shivered.

Jinlun Fawang's eyes sometimes opened and sometimes closed, it was as if he didn't care about what happened in the battle but in actual fact, he saw everything clearly. When he saw Huo Dou was losing he suddenly called out, "A gu si jin de er, mi ma ha si deng, qi er qi er hu!" The crowd didn't know what these Tibetan sentences were but Huo Dou knew, his master was reminding him not to defend so tightly, he needs to start using the "Ferocious Wind Rapid Thunder Skill" against the enemy, Huo Dou started to whistle, the fan on the right and his sleeve on the left created a strong gust of wind, rushing forwards to Zhu Ziliu.

The force of the wind was very strong, the crowd who were watching couldn't help but move backwards slowly, they heard him making thunderbolt like noises with his mouth, they all thought that apart from using weapons, fists and kicks, this "Ferocious Wind Rapid Thunder Skill" also uses the surprising calls of thunder to subdue and control the opponent; it is a very powerful technique. Zhu Ziliu's sleeve took flight, he carried himself proudly and matched him.

The two of them went back and forth for over a hundred moves, Zhu Ziliu had finished writing the 'Zi Yan Tie', the intention of his pen changed, his moves were slow and delayed, the pen strokes were fine and stiff, overflowing with ancient intent.

Huang Rong soliloquized, "There's an ancient saying: 'The fine and obstinate direction leads to the soul', this "Stone Carving of Commending the Wrong Path", never has there been such a display."

Huo Dou continued to use the "Ferocious Wind Rapid Thunder Skill" but because the opponent's strength was strong, the power in his fan increased as did the volume of his shouts and calls. The people who were watching the fight in the main hall could not stand still; step by step they retreated to the courtyard.

Huang Rong saw Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were sitting shoulder to shoulder by the pillar, they were only about ten feet away from the battle, deep in conversation, completely ignoring the battle. The wind that Huo Dou generated had completely no effect on them. She saw Xiao Longnu's belt floating in the wind but Xiao Longnu was unmoved, she just stared lovingly at Yang Guo. The longer that Huang Rong looked, the more curious she became, in the end, she was concentrating on these two more than the battle between Huo Dou and Zhu Ziliu, she thought, "That little girl looks like she possess advanced martial arts, Guo'er and she are so close, I wonder which eminent master is she a disciple of?"

Xiao Longnu was now twenty years old, she had lived in the ancient tomb all her life, avoiding the sunlight, her skin was especially soft and delicate, her internal energy was high, from her appearance, she looked like a sixteen or seventeen year old. Before Xiao Longnu met Yang Guo, experiencing happiness, anger, grief and joy was a rare thing for her. Emotions have the greatest harmful affect on the body and its appearance; and she had spent the last two years like a normal person. If she actually followed her master's teachings and practiced with a clear mind, not only could she meet her hundredth birthday, but when she reaches

that age, her appearances would be the same as a normal fifty year old. Because of this, in Huang Rong's eyes, Xiao Longnu looked younger than Yang Guo, her childlike and innocent air was even more obvious than Guo Fu, no wonder Huang Rong thought that she was a little girl.

Now, Zhu Ziliu's pen was becoming unsightly, but its power was becoming stronger, the delivery of the pen was like a spider web, strong yet soft. Huo Dou was secretly alarmed; it was gradually becoming harder for him to grasp his kung fu.

Jinlun Fawang shouted, "Ma mi ba mi, gu si hei si." No one knew what those eight words meant but the words shook everyone's ears, leaving a ringing sound in them.

Zhu Ziliu was getting impatient, he thought, "If he changes his technique again, I don't know when this battle will end. I am fighting in Dali's name for the Song in this first round, I must not lose. Otherwise shame will be bought onto our nation and school." He suddenly changed his calligraphy style again, the pen didn't appear to be writing words, it now resembled a hatchet hacking into rocks.

Guo Fu managed to see what was happening and asked her mother, "Uncle Zhu is carving words?"

Huang Rong smiled and said, "My daughter is not stupid, the finger technique he's now following is the 'shi gu' script. This is the scriptwriting that one uses in the spring and autumn period; it's the characters that can be seen when one uses a hatchet to carve words on a stone drum. See whether you can recognize the words that Uncle Zhu is writing."

Guo Fu followed the pen but saw that every word he wrote was windy and twisty, all looking like a small painting, she didn't know one word. Huang Rong smiled and said, "That's

an ancient style of calligraphy (used in Zhou dynasty c11 to 256BC), no wonder you wouldn't know any of them; even I can't recognize all of them."

Guo Fu clapped and said, "Naturally, it'll be even harder for that Mongolian idiot to recognize them. Mother, take a look at him, his head is full of sweat and his legs and arms are all over the place."

Indeed, Huo Dou could only recognize a word or two of this ancient style of calligraphy. Since he doesn't know what the opponent is writing, of course he will not be able predict where the pen will attack. It was now difficult for him to respond.

Zhu Ziliu kept on producing word after word of this ancient calligraphy, the characters were profound with an ancient air, and the power of the "Solitary Yang Finger" which the calligraphy style uses as a base also increased.

Huo Dou's fan waved out but he was a bit too slow to take it back, Zhu Ziliu's pen moved and scripted an ancient character on his fan. Huo Dou took a look and asked uncertainly, "Is that 'net'?"

Zhu Ziliu laughed and said, "Wrong, that is 'you'." He then wrote another character on his fan.

Huo Dou said, "Most probably that's 'moon' isn't it?"

Zhu Ziliu shook his head and said, "Wrong, that's 'hence'."

Huo Dou was discouraged, he shook his fan to shake off the pen tip and stop Zhu Ziliu from writing on his fan but he didn't predict that Zhu Ziliu would suddenly sent out a left palm to attack. Huo Dou sent out a palm to block this but this allowed Zhu Ziliu in and he wrote another two characters on his fan but because there wasn't much time,

the characters were not written in the ancient calligraphy style but cursive calligraphy. Huo Dou recognized these characters and called out; “Barbarian!”

Zhu Ziliu laughed and said, “Correct, it is ‘You are hence a barbarian’.”

Everyone hated the Mongols for invading their country and killing their citizens, hate and anger was in their hearts; when they heard Zhu Ziliu insulting Huo Dou by saying ‘You are hence a barbarian’, they all cheered and shouted.

Huo Dou could not handle Zhu Ziliu’s “Solitary Yang Book Finger” with the cursive and ancient calligraphy, he was already afraid. When he heard the cheers and calls, he was even more disturbed. He saw Zhu Ziliu’s pen shaking and waving, writing three ancient characters in a row in midair, how could he think about trying to recognize these characters?

He could only force himself to fight on; he raised his fan to try to protect his vital points on his chest when suddenly he felt his knee go numb. His pressure point had been sealed by the opponent’s pen as it turned. Huo Dou’s knee felt numb and wanted to collapse, but he thought if he kneels, he would have no face. He took a deep breath and surged a current of chi towards the pressure point in his knee. He wanted to leap away and admit defeat when Zhu Ziliu’s pen came in like lightning, sealing his pressure point again. Zhu Ziliu used his pen to replace the finger, using the tip of the pen to make use of the “Solitary Yang Finger” technique, continuously attacking. Could Huo Dou defend against this? His knee became numb and he eventually knelt down onto the floor, his face was devoid of colour.

All the heroes cheered with thunderous noise. Guo Jing said to Huang Rong, “Your ingenious plan worked.” Huang Rong

gave a slight smile.

The Wu brothers were watching from the side, when they saw the boundless changes of their Martial Uncle Zhu's "Solitary Yang Finger", they were both in awe, and were thinking, "Martial Uncle Zhu's internal energy is profound and strong, embedding itself into calligraphy, there are many ingenious and masterly aspects within it. I don't know when I will be able to reach such a stage."

One called out, "Brother!"

The other called, "Little brother!"

The both of them were thinking of the same thing and were about to say something in praise of their Martial Uncle's martial arts. Suddenly Zhu Ziliu called out, 'ah', they quickly turned their heads and saw that he had fallen.

Everyone was shocked at this sudden change of events. After Huo Dou had admitted defeat, Zhu Ziliu had come over to unseal his pressure point. The technique of sealing pressure points using the "Solitary Yang Finger" is completely different than conventional pressure point sealing; it is extremely difficult for others to unseal it so Zhu Ziliu went over to him and tapped his sides a few times, circulating his chi to unseal his pressure point. He couldn't have known that as soon as Huo Dou's pressure point was unsealed, there was an opportunity for Huo Dou to take advantage of him. He gave a grunt and before he stood up, he activated a booby trap in his fan; four poison nails flew out from the fan's spine, all of them hitting Zhu Ziliu in the body.

When skilled fighters duel, when a win or loss is declared, they cannot act again. Never mind that everyone was watching, who could have guessed that that he would suddenly launch an ambush? If Huo Dou had launched his

projectiles in the middle of the duel, even though the booby trap was ingenious, he would not have succeeded in harming his opponent. When Zhu Ziliu was unsealing his pressure point, he was only an inch away from him. The weapon was activated close to the body, even if one's skills were higher, it would have been difficult to avoid this attack. The poison on the nails was produced from the snowy mountains of Western Tibet and is very lethal. As soon as Zhu Ziliu was struck with the nails, his body broke out in unbearable pain; it was difficult for him to stand up properly.

Everyone was shocked and angry, they were all pointing at Huo Dou, insulting and cursing him, saying that he was a brazen scoundrel and despicable.

Huo Dou laughed and said, "The 'Little Prince' has turned defeat into victory, what shame is there in that? Before we started, we did not forbid the use of projectiles. If that brother Zhu succeeded in using a projectile against me, I would have admitted defeat."

Though not everyone agreed with what he said, they did not have a reply to his words, but the insults and curses kept on coming.

Guo Jing dashed over and picked up Zhu Ziliu, he saw the four nails sticking out of his chest, his face looked strange. Guo Jing knew that the poison on the nails was extremely exotic, he quickly sealed three main pressure points to slow down the blood flow, the veins were completely sealed stopping the poison from reaching his heart. He asked Huang Rong, "What should we do?"

Huang Rong frowned without replying, she knew that if she wanted to cure this poison, the antidote must come

personally from Jinlun Fawang or Huo Dou. For the time being, she paced back and forth without an idea.

When Diancang Yuyin saw that his apprentice brother was poisoned, he was worried and angry; he tucked in his gown, wanting to dash forward and fight Huo Dou.

Huang Rong was still thinking about the plan, she thought, "The opponent has already won a match, if Brother Fisherman goes, Da'erba will be the one who will be sent out to meet him, and we won't have a way to win." She quickly said, "Brother, please wait!"

Diancang Yuyin asked, "What for?"

Though Huang Rong was wise and clever, she couldn't give a reply, they had already lost the first match, and there will be some difficulty in the last two matches.

Huo Dou used a trick to beat Zhu Ziliu and he stood at the front of the hall pleased with himself, he took a look all around and felt that he was on top of the world. In the corner of his eye he saw Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo sitting shoulder to shoulder on a stone base, holding each other hands, engaged in conversation. They completely ignored his victory as if nothing had happened; he couldn't stop himself from getting angry and pointed his fan at Yang Guo, shouting out, "Bastard; get up!"

All of Yang Guo's attention was on Xiao Longnu, though the world is a big place, there was nothing that would distract him. Because of this, the heated battle between Huo Dou and Zhu Ziliu was nothing to him; he didn't see or hear it.

In the years he lived with Xiao Longnu in the tomb, he didn't know that he had etched Xiao Longnu deep into his heart and soul, in life or death. That day when Xiao Longnu said she wanted to be his wife, it was such a sudden event,

he had never thought about this before and, startled, he could not think of a reply. After Xiao Longnu had disappeared, he repeated in his heart hundreds of times, "I want her, I want her. Even if I die immediately, I want Gu Gu to be my wife."

The love between he and Xiao Longnu bloomed unconsciously, after they departed, the love kept on flourishing without stop. Yang Guo wasn't afraid of anything, Xiao Longnu was blind to the world and its ways, they just knew that if they desired to love, they loved, if they desired happiness, then they'd get happiness, what had it to do with other people? One didn't care and the other didn't understand, in the midst of a thousand people in the middle of a heated battle, the two of them were holding hands talking to each other, wrapped in love.

When Huo Dou cursed him, Yang Guo was still oblivious of him. Huo Dou wanted to curse him further when Jinlun Fawang ordered, "Our side has won the first round, and we can now proceed onto the second round."

Huo Dou glanced at Yang Guo with hate and then returned to his table and said clearly, "We have won the first round, my apprentice brother Da'erba will fight in the second round, which hero from the other side will come out to meet him?"

Da'erba took out a weapon from his Buddhist robe and went to the middle of the hall. When everyone saw his weapon, they were all shocked; it was a long coarse golden rod. The "Golden Demon Subduing Rod" was around four feet long, the ends of the rod were thick and rough, and the body of the rod glittered with a golden light. It appeared that the weapon was made out of pure gold; it was a lot heavier than an identical rod made out of steel.

He went to the middle of the hall and bowed to the heroes,

and then threw his metal rod up in the air. The golden rod fell down and with a crash sound; two of the large jade flower bowls on the floor were smashed. The rod buried itself one foot into the floor. This was meant as a warning; he was a shriveled and skinny monk but he had the ability to use such a weapon, indicating the level of martial arts he had.

Huang Rong thought, "Brother Jing can subdue this rude monk but Fawang will fight in the third round, then our side will have no one to fight him, the match will be over. This is unspeakable; I'll go and force myself to fight using masterly kung fu to battle him." She raised the Dog Beating Stick and said, "I'll go!"

Guo Jing was extremely shocked and quickly said, "You can't...you can't. Your body is not well, how can you fight?"

Huang Rong felt that there was no other way to achieve victory, if they lost this round then there will be no need for the third round. Just as she was hesitating, Diancang Yuyin called out, "Chief Huang, allow me to fight that evil monk." When he saw the condition that his apprentice brother was in after contracting the poison, his heart was burning and he wanted to take revenge. Huang Rong had no other good ideas, she thought, "We can only struggle on, if he beats the monk, brother Jing will fight Jinlun Fawang to settle this." So she said, "Please be careful apprentice brother."

The Wu brothers took the pair of metal oars that their Marshal Uncle used to him. Diancang Yuyin held them under his arms and went to the middle of the hall. His eyes were red with fury as he circled Da'erba. Da'erba didn't know what it was about, when he saw him walking around him, he turned with to him. Diancang Yuyin suddenly called out, his oars waved out as he hacked down towards his head. Da'erba's movements were extremely fast; he quickly

picked up his Golden Subduing Rod and raised it up in response. The rod and oars met, the clashing sound rang in everyone's ears. Both of them felt a slight pain and both knew their opponent's power was strong, and then they both leapt backwards. Da'erba said a sentence in Tibetan while Diancang Yuyin insulted him in a Dali dialect. Though the two didn't understand the other, they suddenly came close to each other again, the oars and rod came out at the same time, another clashing sound of gold and metal colliding was heard.

This battle was completely different to the graceful and civil fight between Huo Dou and Zhu Ziliu. The two of them fought like copper versus iron, brute force against brute force, the two of them fought with advanced external hard kung fu. The oars and rod created gusts of wind; the onlookers were shocked and astonished.

Diancang Yuyin's natural strength was already high; when he was serving Reverend Yideng he lived in secret in Xiangxi, he used his iron oars to row upstream against the current everyday, his arms became like steel. He is the first disciple of Reverend Yideng and was under his teaching for the longest time. Because he was simple and crass, Reverend Yideng had always treated him with care and love. His natural ability was lacking, his internal energy couldn't compare with Zhu Ziliu's. However, his external hard skills were extremely powerful. Right now, the two were competing with their external hard skills, his strong point; his oars flew up and down as he attacked. Each metal oar was about fifty kilos (110+lbs) but he lifted them up as if they were light, he was as fluid as normal people with sabers or swords that weighed a few kilos.

Da'erba has always thought his natural strength was unbeatable; he couldn't have guessed that he would meet a man with such divine strength in the central plains. Not

only was the opponent's strength high, his stances were also profound, he needed all his efforts to use his golden rod. The rod attacked the oars, the oars attacked the rod; the two of them attacking more than defending.

When Zhu Ziliu and Huo Dou were fighting, the people who were watching were forced backwards because of the great gusts of the winds they generated. Now, three extremely heavy weapons were clashing; along with resisting the wind generated by the weapons, the loud noises created by the clashing of the weapons was also extremely hard to endure. Most of them covered their ears as they watched.

Under the candlelight, the golden rod glittered, the two steel oars were like two streaks of black, the weapons swirled and tangled with each other; the fight was becoming more and more spectacular.

The crowd had never seen such a battle in their lives. Of course there had been even more dangerous and perilous situations, but when skilled fighters compete with internal energy one with another; the effects are on the inside. From the outside, it looks very ordinary. When it came to the stances and the countering techniques of weapons and fists, it had ingenious and refined aspects but it couldn't compare with the ferocious aspects of the stances. It is extremely rare to see someone with Diancang Yuyin's kind of divine strength, but it is even rarer to see two people with the same kind of divine strength engaged in such a heated battle as this one.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong watched with sweating palms. Guo Jing said, "Rong'er, do you think our side will win?"

Huang Rong said, "I can't make it out right now."

In reality, how would Guo Jing not know what was happening in the battle, but he hoped that his wife would

say 'Yuyin can win' so his heart could be comforted.

Tens of moves passed but their energy didn't decrease; instead it became even more vigorous. Diancang Yuyin called out as he attacked with his oars to increase his clout.

Da'erba asked, "What did you say?" He spoke in Tibetan, how would Diancang Yuyin understand?

He too called out, "What did you say?" Da'erba didn't understand either.

The two of them assumed that they were insulting each other, they fought fiercely, the chairs and tables in the hall flew up. The crowd was worried that the one of them would lose concentration and hit one of the pillars in the hall, causing the hall to collapse.

Jinlun Fawang and Huo Duo were both secretly alarmed, if this battle continued on for much longer, even if Da'erba gains victory, he will be severely injured. But how could the fight stop with the two battling so heatedly?

The two of them leapt and jumped around, calling out as they fought violently, the yellow glow and dark trail forced the candlelight to darken; suddenly, a ferocious heaven shattering noise was heard, the two of them called out and leapt away at the same time.

When the oar in Yuyin's right hand collided with the golden rod, the two of them were using all their strength, the handle of the oar was narrow and not as firm as the golden rod, hence, the oar snapped in half. The blade part flew away and a 'dang' sound was heard as it dropped in front of Xiao Longnu.

Xiao Longnu was completely absorbed in conversation with Yang Guo, she was unaware and the oar blade part struck

her on the toes of the left foot. She gave out a cry of 'ai ya' and leapt up. When she called out in pain, Yang Guo was alarmed and quickly asked, "Are you hurt?" Xiao Longnu rubbed her toes, the wincing at the pain that could be seen on her face.

Yang Guo was furious; he turned around to look for the person who used the metal slab to hurt his Gu Gu. He saw Diancang Yuyin holding the handle of the broken oar in his right hand and was disagreeing with Da'erba; he wanted to use his single oar to fight him. Da'erba shook his head; he knew that the enemy's strength and stamina compared to his was six of one and half a dozen to the other. If they continued, it would be difficult to get a result, since now he has the advantage in weaponry; the winner of this round is himself.

Huo Dou stood up tall and said clearly, "We have won two rounds out of the three; the position of the Chancellor belongs to my master, everyone..."

Before he finished, Yang Guo said to Yuyin, "How did your steel oar break, how did it fly over and hit my Gu Gu?"

Yuyin said, "I... I..."

Yang Guo said, "Your steel oar is poorly made, quickly go and apologize to my Gu Gu." Diancang Yuyin saw that he was a little boy and didn't pay him any attention. Yang Guo suddenly stretched out his arm and snatched the broken handle out of his hand and called out, "Quickly go and say sorry to my Gu Gu."

Huo Dou was interrupted by him and was furious, he shouted, "Little bastard! Get out of the way!"

Yang Guo called out, "Little bastard is insulting who?"

When Huo Dou heard him say ‘Little bastard is insulting who’ he replied without much thought, “Little bastard is insulting you!” How would he know that boys from the south had always talked in this manner to argue, he wasn’t concentrating and fell into the trap.

Yang Guo laughed out loud and said, “Correct, it is a little bastard who’s insulting me!”

Everyone in the main hall was very worried and anxious, but after hearing this young man’s sudden comment, everyone broke out in laughter. Huo Dou was furious; he took out his folded fan and attacked Yang Guo’s head.

Everyone had just seen Huo Dou in action and knew that his martial arts were terrific, if the fan lands on Yang Guo’s head, if he didn’t die, he would be severely injured, they all called out, “Hold it!” “You can’t bully someone younger.”

Guo Jing darted out and was about to snatch the fan away when Yang Guo ducked down and darted underneath Huo Dou’s arm. The handle of the oar swirled round; Yang Guo used the “Dog Beating Stick Technique’s” ‘coil’ formulae and tripped up Huo Dou’s legs. Huo Dou could not stand up properly; he stumbled and almost fell onto the floor. Huo Dou was highly skilled, he changed the stumbling force into a leaping force, he leapt into the air and came down steady.

Guo Jing was startled, he asked, “Guo’er, what’s the matter?”

Yang Guo laughed and said, “Nothing. He doesn’t respect Hong Qigong’s “Dog Beating Stick Technique”. I wanted to use the “Dog Beating Stick Technique” to trip him up; it’s a pity that he managed to jump away.”

Guo Jing was surprised and asked, “How do you know this technique?”

Yang Guo lied and said, "Just now when Chief Lu fought him; I learned a few stances after watching him."

Guo Jing knew that he wasn't the sharpest tool in the box, he knew that there are a lot of people who were cleverer than him, and he believed what Yang Guo said without any doubts.

Huo Dou assumed that it was his fault for being careless and this allowed Yang Guo to make him stumble; how would he know that a teenager like Yang Guo would possess such great martial arts? The most serious matter now is fighting for the position of the Chancellor of Wulin, it won't be too late if he first completes the serious task and then punishes the punk. So he took a large step towards Guo Jing and said, "Hero Guo, it is we who are the victors in today's duel, my master Jinlun Fawang is the Chancellor of Wulin. If there is anyone who doesn't agree with this..."

Before he finished, Yang Guo sneaked up behind him, he sent the oar handle forward and used the "Dog Beating Stick Technique's" fourth stance of the 'poke' formulae, suddenly poking Huo Dou's backside. With Huo Dou's abilities, how would he not know when someone was sneaking up behind to ambush him? However, the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" is extremely ingenious and masterly; though he realized what was happening, his sudden dodge was not perfect and there was still a chance to hit him. A 'pu' sound was heard as he was hit in the backside. Even though his internal energy was profound, the buttocks are an area of the body with a lot of flesh, the attack was very painful, and was coupled with the shock of getting hit. He thought that he would definitely avoid this attack but the attack managed to get him, and he couldn't stop himself from giving out a 'ah' call.

Yang Guo shouted, "What was that? I don't agree to this!"

In a flash the hall was filled with laughter. The heroes all thought not only is this teenager naughty, he was extremely bold, the Mongolian Prince was twice undone by him.

Now that it has reached this point, how could Huo Dou not be angry? He turned his hand and wanted to smack him across the face to vent his anger before doing anything else. This was a casual palm but the force behind the palm is derived from the main theories from the school of Tibet. This palm was meant to knock the young man unconscious.

Guo Jing knew that this palm was powerful, he stretched out his left arm and hooked it up, grabbing Huo Dou's palm. Guo Jing said, "How can you mess around with a little kid?"

When Huo Dou's arm was grabbed, he felt half his body going numb, he couldn't stop his shock and anger from rising.

Yang Guo took the opportunity and swept the oar handle across, striking him heavily across the backside, he called out, "Disobedient bastard, father's going to spank you!"

Guo Jing shouted, "Guo'er, get back, don't make trouble." But the crowd all laughed.

The Mongolian warriors on the other side were all calling out, "Two versus one?" "You don't want face!" "Does that count as dueling?"

Guo Jing was startled, and released Huo Dou's hand.

Huang Rong saw Yang Guo's trip and poke that he just used were definitely the stances of the "Dog Beating Stick Technique"; she was very suspicious. "Where did he steal this technique from? Could it be that in the past few months that I've been teaching Lu Youjiao, he has been spying on us? But each time I start teaching, I've searched around,

how could he hide from me?" She called out, "Brother Jing, come back."

Guo Jing returned to this wife's side but he was worried that Yang Guo would suffer, his eyes did not leave the two people in the middle of the hall. He saw Huo Dou sending out palms and kicks, attacking Yang Guo.

Yang Guo was dodging and calling out at the same time, "I'm going to spank you, spank you!" The oar handle kept on attacking Huo Dou's backside, but Huo Dou's movements were quick, each hit met thin air. Huo Dou wanted to use his folded fan to hit Yang Guo on his head, but Yang Guo kept on using the oar handle to hit his backside. The two were chasing and rushing around; the two of them circled the hall very rapidly but neither of them could hit each other. At first, the onlookers just felt something weird was going on, but when they saw the two of them circling around the hall, they were extremely shocked. Though Yang Guo is of a young age, his footsteps were light and his movements were swift and nimble, there was no difference between him and Huo Dou. Huo Dou attacked him a few times but each time, Yang Guo managed to escape cleverly.

Dianchang Yuyin and Da'erba were originally arguing about their weapons and staring angrily at each other. One would want to dash forward and fight again; the other was completely prepared in case the opponent suddenly attacked. When they saw that Huo Dou couldn't handle such a young man, they both were extremely surprised; one of them opened his mouth and laughed loudly, the other shouted out insults in Tibetan.

In the blink of an eye, Huo Dou and Yang Guo had circled around the hall three times; Huo Dou could see that his opponent's lightness kung fu was terrific, if he continued to

follow and chase him like this, he might lose. He suddenly turned around, his left palm came out in front of him to grab the oar handle, the fan in his right hand came out to seal the 'Looping Jump' pressure point of the side of his leg.

However Yang Guo did not want to meet him face on, he swerved his body around the fan and kept on hitting out with the oar handle, calling out, "Father wants to spank you! A day doesn't go past without three spanks, I have spanked you twice, there's one more!" To use such a method to ridicule your opponent in battle without danger, your kung fu must be a lot better than the opponent's in all areas. Although Yang Guo had learned many advanced martial arts, his kung fu still could not compare with Huo Dou's; acting like this would definitely result in trouble. However, the crowd was watching with passion, they all cheered, called out, and they applauded to urge him on.

When Huo Dou heard this, his mind was disturbed; if his backside is struck once more by this child in front of these people, even if he killed this boy, he still will have lost a lot of face. Because of this he concentrated on dodging and evading and forgot about attacking; Yang Guo was able to avoid danger for now.

By now, Huang Rong could tell that an eminent master had instructed Yang Guo, his kung fu really was terrific. She also remembered the day when he passed on his internal energy to her to help her recuperate; the internal energy he had developed was not ordinary. She thought that by allowing him to stir up trouble for a while, attention had actually been drawn away from the two defeats, so she called out, "Guo'er, go and fight him, I don't think he's your match."

Yang Guo stuck his tongue out at Huo Dou and said, "Do you dare?" He stood still and pointed to his nose.

Although Huo Dou was furious, he couldn't allow a little thing like this get in the way of the mission. Their side had now won two rounds; they have taken the position of Chancellor of Wulin. Why should he get involved with a little kid? He said, "Little bastard, I'll take my time in teaching you a lesson. Right now, the Chancellor of Wulin Jinlun Fawang will say a few words, everyone listen to his orders."

All the heroes made a hue and cry, disagreeing, clamoring and shouting.

Huo Dou said loudly, "We agreed before hand, two wins out of three. Doesn't your word count?"

All these heroes are famous people of the Jianghu world, they all knew what his words meant, he wanted them to go back on their words, this would never happen; but they had lost the last two rounds in a unjust way. The first round they lost due to an ambush, in the second, only the weapon was broken, they haven't really lost that round yet, and it was difficult for them to accept that justice was done. When Huo Dou asked them this question, they didn't have a reply.

Yang Guo said, "Look at that old monk, look how tall and skinny he is, he looks weird, how can he be the Chancellor of Wulin? I don't think he's worthy."

Huo Dou angrily said, "Who's the Master of this child? Take a control of him. If he continues to cause trouble, I won't hold back."

Yang Guo said, "My Master is worthy to take the position of the Chancellor of Wulin, what skill does your master have?"

Huo Dou said, "Who is your Master? Please invite them out." He saw Yang Guo's martial arts weren't ordinary; he assumed that his master must be a skilled fighter so he used the word 'please' in his sentence."

Yang Guo said, "Today, the disciples are representing their masters to fight for the position of Chancellor of Wulin, isn't that it?"

Huo Dou said, "Correct, our side has won two of the three rounds, because of this, my Master is the Chancellor of Wulin."

Yang Guo said, "Fine, even if you beat them all, so what? You won't be able to beat my Master's disciple."

Huo Dou asked, "Who is you Master's disciple?"

Yang Guo laughed and said, "Donkey! My Master's disciple is of course me." The crowd listened to his words with amusement and broke out in laughter. Yang Guo said, "We'll compete for another three rounds, if you can win two rounds out of the three, I'll recognize that monk as the Chancellor of Wulin. If I win two rounds, then sorry, the position of the Chancellor of Wulin goes to my Master."

When the crowd heard him say this, they all thought, "Could it be that this boy's master is some eminent master, and has come here to challenge the position of Chancellor of Wulin with Hong Qigong and Jinlun Fawang? They didn't care who the master of this boy was; at least they are Han. The young man cannot beat Huo Dou; however victory to the Mongols will allow them to take the position of Chancellor. Our side has already been defeated, a new complication might bring about a reversal of fortunes so they all said, "Correct, I agree, only if you Mongols gain another two victories." "That young brother is correct." "The central plains have many great fighters, you were lucky in gaining those two rounds. Who cares about that?"

Huo Dou pondered, "The opponent's two strongest fighters have already lost, what's there to be afraid of in fighting two more rounds? I'm only afraid that after two comes

another two.” He said to Yang Guo, “Your Master has a right to challenge for the position of the Chancellor of Wulin, however, there are thousands and thousands of heroes in this world, after one round comes another, when will it stop?”

Yang Guo raised his head and said, “My Master doesn’t care about who takes the place of the Chancellor of Wulin, but when she saw your Master, her anger flared up.”

Huo Dou said, “Who is your Master? Where is Senior?”

Yang Guo laughed and said, “Senior is in front of your eyes. Hey, Gu Gu, he asks how Senior is.” Xiao Longnu gave an ‘en’ sound and nodded to Huo Dou.

Everyone was startled at first but then burst out in laughter. They saw that Xiao Longnu was beautiful, she was younger than Yang Guo; how could she be his master? The young man must be joking, trying to make a fool out of Huo Dou. Only Hao Datong, Sun Bu’Er, Zhao Zhijing and Yin Zhiping knew that he was telling the truth.

Though Huang Rong was intelligent and wise, she could not believe such a pretty, delicate, young girl could be his master.

Huo Duo was furious, he shouted, “Little bastard is talking crap! There are many important matters to be resolved today at this heroes gathering, how can I allow you to make trouble here? Crawl away.”

Yang Guo said, “Your Master is ugly and dark, his words are gibberish, it is extremely hard on the ears. Look at how beautiful my master is, graceful and elegant; if she is the Chancellor of Wulin, won’t that be a lot better than your ugly monk Master?” When Xiao Longnu heard Yang Guo praising her beauty, she was delighted, she revealed a

smile, it really was like a flower blooming, a halo of beautiful jade, unparalleled elegance.

The crowd saw that Yang Guo was becoming more and more daring in his attempt to make a fool of his opponent, they felt great delight; a few experienced people were secretly worried that Huo Dou would take his life.

Indeed, Huo Dou could no longer take it and called out, "All the world's heroes, please can I have your attention; when the young Prince kills this little punk, he will only have himself to blame, it is not my fault." His folded fan moved, he was about to attack Yang Guo's head.

Yang Guo impersonated his voice and stuck out his chest, he called out, "All the world's heroes, please can I have your attention, when the little punk kills this Prince, he will only have himself to blame, it is not the fault of the little punk!" In the midst of the laughter, he suddenly swept the oar handle towards Huo Dou's backside.

Huo Dou moved out of the way and sent his fan out along with a lightning left palm, straight towards his head. The fan was a decoy, the palm was not; all his strength was behind that palm, his intention was to split open Yang Guo's head in one stroke. Yang Guo slanted his body and moved away, along the way, he pushed out a table towards him, a 'ge' sound was heard as Huo Dou's palm landed on the table; splinters flew everywhere as the table was split in half.

The onlookers gulped as they saw Huo Dou's frightening strength.

Huo Dou kicked the table out of the way and immediately afterward followed it up with another attack. Yang Guo saw that his palm was ruthless and didn't dare to take it easy anymore; he used the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" with

the oar handle to fight him. Hong Qigong personally taught him the stances of the “Dog Beating Stick Technique” that day on the peak of Mount Hua. He had performed the technique’s most ingenious and masterly aspects for Ouyang Feng; he had now also heard the formulae and changes of the technique from Huang Rong when she was teaching Lu Youjiao. When the two aspects were combined, he was able to use the technique properly. But the oar handle was too heavy and too short, it wasn’t very convenient, after another ten moves, the oar handle was trapped to one side by Huo Dou’s fan.

Huang Rong saw that he really was using the “Dog Beating Stick Technique”, though the stances weren’t smooth and not fully utilized. When he used it, the techniques he used looked proper and like the real thing, she knew that his weapon wasn’t convenient for him so she went into the middle of the hall and stuck the stick in between the two and said, “Guo’er, to beat dogs you need the Dog Beating Stick. You can borrow Chief Lu’s Dog Beating Stick. After you’ve finished beating the evil dog, return the stick.”

The Dog Beating Stick is the property of the Beggar Clan’s Chief; it had to be clear that it was being borrowed.

Yang Guo was delighted and received the stick. Huang Rong whispered into his ear, “Force him to give up the antidote.” As soon as she said this she returned to her place.

Yang Guo had not paid any attention to Zhu Ziliu falling victim to a concealed weapon; he didn’t know what antidote she was talking about and was slightly startled; Huo Dou’s palm chopped down. Yang Guo raised the Dog Beating Stick and pointed towards Huo Dou’s belly. The bamboo stick was strong and sturdy, the length and weight was perfect; using the Dog Beating Stick to perform the “Dog Beating Stick

Technique” can only result in an increase of power. Huo Dou had sent out a palm that was chopping across his neck when he saw the bamboo stick come out, it was aiming for the ‘Sealed First’ pressure point three inches below his navel. This was an important pressure point to the movement of the veins; this little punk’s ability in recognizing pressure points was so precise that Huo Dou couldn’t help being shocked.

As he had tangled with Yang Guo, he thought that Yang Guo was just a nimble young man who had been advised by a great master; after he saw this stance of piercing towards his pressure point, he began to treat him as an opponent who could match him. He didn’t dare to take it easy; he returned his palm and used his fan to protect his chest. The onlookers saw that he had changed his stance into defense showing that he was worried about Yang Guo, they were even more surprised.

Yang Guo said, “Wait, this little punk does not fight for no reason, there has to be a wager.”

Huo Dou said, “Fine, if you lose, kowtow to me three times and call me Grandfather three times.”

Yang Guo again used a trick that children from Jiang Nan used to take advantage of others, he pretended he didn’t hear and asked, “Call what?”

Using this trick makes it very easy for the other person to fall into the trap. Huo Dou had grown up in Mongolia and Tibet and had always been surrounded by honest people, how would he understand the craftiness of Jiang Nan kids, so he casually replied, “Call grandfather!”

Yang Guo responded, “En, good Grandson; say it one more time.”

The crowd broke out into laughter again and Huo Dou knew that he had again fallen for a trick; he clenched his teeth, with the fan in his right hand and his left palm, he attacked like a violent storm.

Yang Guo used all his strength to repel him and said, "If you lose, you need to give the antidote to me."

Huo Dou angrily said, "I'll lose to you? Stop daydreaming bastard!"

Yang Guo raised the bamboo stick and shouted, "Little bastard is scolding who?"

Huo Dou said, "Little bastard is scolding..." As he got up to this part, he suddenly became aware; at least he managed to rein back the horse from the cliff, the last word 'you' was held back.

Yang Guo laughed and said, "Little Prince, I've taught you a few things, remember it." Though his words were said easily, it was becoming more and more difficult for his hands to cope.

Huo Dou is Jinlun Fawang's proudest disciple, he had received the important aspects of the Tibetan school, and he was able to exchange almost a thousand stances with Reverend Yideng's strongest disciple. His internal energy was profound; he and Yang Guo should not be mentioned in the same breath.

At first, Yang Guo was able to get an advantage by making him angry; Huo Dou had not fought with his full strength, now he really was fighting. After twenty moves or so, the comparison between he and Yang Guo was clear; Yang Guo was definitely inferior. The crowd saw that he was of a young age yet he managed to last so long against Huo Dou, they all praised him and said, "This child is amazing." They

all asked each other whose tutelage is this young man under.

Huo Dou saw that his opponent was weaker than him and sent out stronger and stronger palms. The “Dog Beating Stick Technique” that Yang Guo was using is ingenious and inspired, Huo Dou’s fan and palm techniques could not match it; but all Hong Qigong taught him was the stances, he had heard the formulae and principles from Huang Rong. He was clever and managed to force himself to combine the two and use it, but it was impossible for him to understand and comprehend everything immediately, so of course the power of the technique cannot be fully utilized. After a while, Yang Guo was dodging and flashing around, but it was difficult for him to attack.

Ever since the first fight started, Guo Fu and the Wu brothers had been watching intently, quietly talking to each other. When Yang Guo came out and started to fight, they were shocked and surprised. The Wu brothers said that he was rash and impudent, he’s just asking for trouble, Guo Fu was on the opposite side, she praised Yang Guo, saying that he was daring and ardent. When the Wu brothers heard this, their hearts ached with an uncomfortable feeling. When the two brothers first saw the closeness between Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo when she first arrived, the two of them glanced at each other and were able to relax. When they heard Yang Guo say that she was his master, though they didn’t know whether this was true or not, their hearts sank. Now, they saw that Yang Guo was forced onto his back foot (as sign that he is losing) by Huo Dou, the two brothers knew that they shouldn’t wish that the enemy would win, but deep in their hearts, they hoped that the more he suffers the better. Because of the trouble in their hearts, the two experienced many different emotions in the blink of eye.

Guo Fu didn't have any good feelings towards Yang Guo but she didn't loathe him either; she just treated him as a down on his luck, incapable person. He was insignificant, but when she heard her father wanted to betroth her to him, she was angry. But she still thought that this would never happen so she didn't take it to mind. Later on, she saw that his martial arts were anything but ordinary, she was just surprised and nothing more; yet when she saw that he was in danger, she couldn't stop herself from worrying about him.

Yang Guo knew that if this continued, within ten moves he would succumb to his opponent. He had glanced over and saw that although Xiao Longnu was still sitting on the stone base, her back was no longer leaning against the pillar. She was paying close attention, at any moment she would leap out and help him. He had an idea; he suddenly waved the stick and flew across, leaping over Xiao Longnu's legs.

Huo Dou shouted, "Where are you going?" He followed after him.

Xiao Longnu's legs raised slightly, the tip of her left foot aimed towards Huo Dou's 'Descendant's Arrangement' pressure point on his right ankle, the tip of her right foot kicked towards his left foot's 'Surging Spring' pressure point.

At least Huo Duo's skills were profound and refined, he saw what was happening, there was a nimble change, Xiao Longnu's legs had risen a little, and the bystanders didn't think anything of it. He himself knew that Xiao Longnu had used a lethal attack, in the midst of this he used a stance of "The Mandarin Duck's Looping Kick"; his legs kicked thin air in a loop and avoided the motionless pressure point kick by Xiao Longnu.

When Yang Guo went by Xiao Longnu's legs, he knew what was going to happen; he didn't wait for his opponent to fall to the ground and attacked with his Dog Beating Stick.

Huo Dou stretched out his fan and supported it against the stick and used the force to move faraway from Xiao Longnu. He couldn't stop himself from glancing over at her, thinking, "Indeed there are many able people in the central plains, that boy and girl are still in their teens, how come they are so good?"

With the advantage of an extra stance, Yang Guo kept on attacking with the stick technique, he used three critical stances in a row, and Huo Dou was scrambling about, using all his strength to repel the attack. However, Yang Guo did not have an ingenious fourth attack to continue the chain, he slowed down momentarily and allowed Huo Dou to counterattack, and was on the receiving end again.

The onlookers did not understand the stick technique and it went by them, Huang Rong however kept on calling out "What a pity" in secret, she couldn't hold in her thoughts and said, "The stick returns across the ground under the clever hand, striking the twin dogs without return." This was one of the formulae of the "Dog Beating Stick Technique", though Yang Guo knew the stances and formulae, he didn't know when to use them; when he heard Huang Rong recite this, he immediately brushed the stick across the ground and attacked forward without returning.

The direction and force of this stick was weird, though he used it, he didn't know what use it had. How could it be that as soon as the stick attacked forward, it happened just at the same time as the opponent raised his fan? Huo Dou had not finished using this stance but knew something was wrong, he hurriedly jumped up and moved away.

Huang Rong continued, "When the dog leaps over the wall how can it be beaten? Quickly hit its backside and chop its tail." This stick technique had been passed from generation to generation in the Beggar Clan. Beggars aren't the most elegant and cultured, the words of course would be vulgar.

The bystanders thought that Huang Rong was ridiculing him by calling him a dog; they didn't know that she was giving martial arts advice to Yang Guo. Though the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" wasn't taught to anyone other than the chief; but firstly, Yang Guo had already learned it, and secondly, this match was extremely important, victory was needed. Huang Rong couldn't care about the clan's rules anymore, when she saw the two of them advancing and retreating, attacking and defending, she kept on calling out pieces of advice.

Every phrase she called out was ingenious and what was needed, and along with Yang Guo's intelligence, he was able to unleash the stances power. After he gained the upper hand many times, he didn't wait for Huang Rong to finish the line before he continued, he just needed the first few words and was immediately able to use right technique. The power of the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" was indeed strong, even with Huo Dou's level of martial arts, a bamboo stick was able to run circles around him, and he had no chance to attack. Everyone saw that after a few more moves, the skilled Prince of the other nation would lose. The heroes' surprise and delight rose. The hall was filled with cheers.

Huo Dou quickly unleashed two stances with his fan forcing Yang Guo away a few steps and then called out, "Hold it!"

Yang Guo laughed and said, "What? My Grandson admits defeat?"

Huo Dou's face was angry and said firmly; "You said you are challenging for the position of Chancellor for your master, why are you using the martial arts of Hong Qigong? If you say you are representing Hong Qigong, we've just had two rounds. Are you people trying to cause confusion, deny it or not?"

Huang Rong didn't think wrongly, these words were difficult to refute, she was about to argue with him when Yang Guo interrupted, "This time you are speaking like a person, indeed this stick technique is not my Master's, even if I beat you, you won't take it. If you want to test out my skills, it's not hard. Just know I used another sect's kung fu because I was afraid that when I unleash my own sect's kung fu, you'd lose even more tragically." When he heard Huo Dou's words, he looked over towards Xiao Longnu and realized something, "Luckily that Prince woke me up. If I use the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" to beat him, how will I be able to show off Gu Gu's abilities? How could Gu Gu not be offended if I've forgotten her great kindness in teaching me martial arts?" In reality, Xiao Longnu was really innocent and naïve, her heart was filled with love and passion for Yang Guo. As long as she could see him, she was fulfilled; she didn't care about anything else. If he wins that's great, if he loses there's no harm, it doesn't matter. And when it comes to whether he uses their sect's kung fu or not, or whether he'd listen to Huang Rong's advice, she didn't take any of that to heart.

Huo Dou thought, "If you don't use the "Dog Beating Stick Technique", how hard will it be to take your life?" So he chuckled and said, "Fine, I'll experience your Master's great stances."

The most refined techniques that Yang Guo had learned under Xiao Longnu were swordplay, so he faced the crowd and said, "Please can I borrow one of you Senior's sword."

Within the two thousand or so people in the hall, three hundred of them carried a sword, when they heard Yang Guo's request, they all agreed and offered their swords.

Before Hao Datong and Sun Bu'Er entered the tutelage of Wang Chongyang, they were patriotic people; after they were nurtured by Wang Chongyang; their desire to repel the barbarian invaders was even stronger.

They were of course angry with Yang Guo, who expelled himself from the Quanzhen sect, but now when they saw that he was helping China to fend off the enemy, they flung their sect's feud with him to one side.

Sun Bu'Er was the weakest of the Quanzhen Seven Masters, before Wang Chongyang died, he gave her Quanzhen's sharpest and most precious sword to help compensate for her weak kung fu. She saw that Yang Guo was requesting a sword to fight off the enemy so she dashed forward to the front, her hands holding a glittering, precious sword and said, "Use this sword!"

Yang Guo saw that the sword was like a clear autumn river, he knew that it was a weapon which could cut through gold and jade, if he used it to fight Huo Dou, he would definitely be able to gain some advantage. But as soon as he saw the Taoist gown that Sun Bu'Er was wearing, he immediately thought about the suffering that he had in Quanzhen, and also remembered how Grandma Sun died under the palm of Hao Datong. He rolled his eyes and didn't take the sword, he instead turned around and borrowed a dark and rusted iron sword from a Beggar Clan member and said, "I'll borrow this brother's sword." He left Sun Bu'Er standing there like a corpse; she couldn't advance forward or go back. Though she practiced Taoism, it is hard to cleanse the fiery nature of martial artist; this young man dared to throw back her good intentions of lending her sword, she couldn't

stop herself from getting angry. She wanted to scold and curse him but the enemy was here, it wasn't convenient to start another argument, she forced herself to endure her anger and returned to the crowd.

Yang Guo's character was too determined and stubborn, he loved and hated in the extreme; originally he would have taken this opportunity to repair some of the damage between him and Quanzhen, but his reaction deepened the hatred between the two sides.

When Huo Dou saw that Yang Guo didn't take the precious sword but chose a rusty iron sword instead, he was worried. When one reaches an extremely high level in martial arts, flowers and leaves can be used to harm people, not needing the sharpness of weaponry. He pondered about the opponent taking such a blunt sword, was he really that strong? He opened his fan and fluttered it twice; he was about to open his mouth to signal the start of the battle.

Yang Guo's sword pointed to the four words written by Zhu Ziliu on his fan, he laughed and said, "You are hence a barbarian, everyone knows that, there's no need to spread it everywhere."

Huo Dou's face went red, a 'pai' sound was heard as the fan close and became a short stick, he pointed the fan towards Yang Guo's 'Shoulder Well' pressure point, his left palm came chopping out with the force of a strong wind, ruthless and swift. Yang Guo's iron sword moved as he used the "Jade Maiden Sword Technique" in response.

Years ago when Lin Chaoying studied bitterly in the stone tomb, she didn't leave the tomb again after she developed the "Jade Heart Manual" kung fu. She passed this skill onto her maid, who imparted it to Xiao Longnu who in turn

passed it onto Yang Guo. Not only did the maid not take a step into the world of Wulin, she never took a step off Mount Zhongnan. Though Li Mochou is Xiao Longnu's senior apprentice sister, she was not taught the advanced and profound sword techniques of her master. She gained fame throughout the Jianghu world through the use of her projectiles, fly whisk and palm techniques. Right now, he used the Ancient Tomb sect's sword techniques, many skilled fighters from various schools and sects were amassed in the hall today, but apart from Xiao Longnu, no one knew this sword technique.

The martial arts of the Ancient Tomb sect was developed by a woman, the next two generations were also women, it was unavoidable that the martial arts developed too much lightness and softness, and there wasn't enough power and fierceness. When Xiao Longnu taught him these stances, the stances carried thirty percent of this gracefulness and elegance. After he understood it completely, automatically he removed the femininity from the stances and turned its nature into a swift, at ease and airy style. The Ancient Tomb's lightness kung fu is unparalleled; Yang Guo was now moving around the main hall, before a stance was finished, a second stance arrived.

When the sword stances were first unleashed, the body was on the left, when the stances were repelling the enemy the body had turned to the right, it was as if the sword and user were completely separated. The two of them had nothing to do with each other; he only used around ten stances of this sword technique. Everyone was startled and watched in admiration. Huo Dou's fan techniques were also a great skill; it had swipes, strikes, thrusts and pierces, and this too relied on swiftness, lightness and softness to overcome the enemy. But now it had met up with the Ancient Tomb's matchless lightness kung fu and he was unable to unleash

his moves. Plus, he was ridiculed by Yang Guo because of the four words written by Zhu Ziliu, he didn't want to open his fan again and so the 'swiping' aspect of his fan technique could not be used.

When Guo Fu and the Wu brothers saw how excellent Yang Guo's sword techniques were, their six eyes were opened widely and they didn't have anything more to say.

The happiest person in the crowd was Guo Jing, he saw that the son of Yang Kang had learned such a good level of martial arts; even he couldn't see what the origins of these techniques were. When he remembered the deep ties between the Guo and Yang families, he couldn't stop sadness and joy from stirring in his heart. Huang Rong glanced over at her husband, she saw that his eyes were red, a smile was on his lips; she knew what he was thinking and stretched out her hand and took his right hand.

When Huo Dou saw that he couldn't handle his enemy, he began to get impatient; he thought that if he loses to this young punk today, his name will be in ruins, how could he make his name in the central plains? He saw Yang Guo's sword pointed at an angle, the sword tip dispersed and he attacked three places in quick succession; if he only was able to dodge them, he would be on his way to losing, so he opened his fan and blocked these three attacks. He called out again and used the "Ferocious Wind Rapid Thunder Skill" again to counterattack. With his status as a skilled fighter of Wulin, he should not use all his abilities and effort in fighting a young man. He'll lose all face if he wins in such a manner. But all he cared about right now was winning, how could he care about such things? He kept on calling out; a ruthless stance followed by an even more ruthless stance.

Yang Guo's sword was light and lively, the stances kept on coming without stopping, and it really was graceful, elegant and leisurely. This set of "Beautiful Maiden Sword" overcomes the opponent through grace and subtlety, and in contrast with the opponent's calls and shouts, Yang Guo's gracefulness and exquisiteness was even more emphasized. Though Yang Guo was wearing a torn and ragged garment, the sword technique's elegance and grace became clear in the eyes of the crowd; they felt that he was handsome and striking, and must be a fine son of a well to do family.

However, as Yang Guo prioritized in achieving the elegance and gracefulness of the stances, the power of the sword technique became difficult to unleash. Huo Dou fought without care for his life, he fought more and more fiercely; Yang Guo's strength gradually started to drain away.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong saw that he was on his way to losing and their eyebrows creased. They then saw the gusts of wind created by Huo Dou's sleeve and fan becoming stronger and stronger, they couldn't stop themselves from calling out in their hearts, "Oh no!"

Suddenly Yang Guo held his sword up and called out, "Careful! I'm going to use a projectile!"

Huo Dou had used his fan's poison nails to injure Zhu Ziliu; when he heard Yang Guo say this, he knew that the iron sword was like his fan, there is a secret weapon hidden within. No wonder he didn't pick the sharp sword and instead chose the rusty one. Since he used such a method to gain victory, the opponent could do so too. When he saw Yang Guo's sword pointing to his front, he quickly leapt away. But all he saw was Yang Guo's left hand leading the sword, thrusting forward; what projectile?

Huo Dou knew he had fallen into Yang Guo's trap and cursed him; "Little bastard!"

Yang Guo asked, "Little bastard curses who?" Huo Dou didn't reply and pressed forward with his palm.

Yang Guo's left hand rose up and he called out, "The projectile is coming!" Huo Dou quickly dodged to the right, the opponent's sword was coming in exactly from the right; Huo Dou quickly pulled back and turned his waist, the sword tip brushed past his ribs from the right. This sword was extremely vicious, when it missed; the crowd all called out, "What a pity!"

The Mongolian warriors secretly thought, "Shameful!"

Though Huo Dou managed to escape from death, his back had broken out in a cold sweat due to fright; he saw Yang Guo's left hand rise up again and call out, "Projectile!" He didn't take notice of him anymore and advanced forwards with his palms, indeed, the opponent was using a trick again.

Yang Guo's sword pierced thin air as he attacked forwards, his left hand rose up a fourth time and loudly called out, "Projectile!"

Huo Dou scolded, "Little...."

Before the second word was said, a flash of gold suddenly appeared in his eyes; he was now close to his opponent and after all the false calls by his opponent, he was completely off guard. He quickly leapt up but felt his leg pricked by a very small and fine projectile. Although a projectile hit him, he thought it was small and wouldn't do much; furiously, his fan slashed forward and his palm chopped out, he wanted to kill that crafty kid right there and then.

Yang Guo had now achieved his aim, why should he continue to fight so hard; he just used his sword to defend, he laughed as he said, "I warned you on many occasions about launching a projectile, and you didn't believe me. I didn't lie, did I?"

Huo Duo was about to attack with his palm when he suddenly felt his leg go numb and itchy as if a large mosquito had bitten him. He tried to endure it and finish attacking but the numbness and itchiness became stronger and stronger. He was alarmed, "Damn, that little bastard's projectile has poison on it!" After this quick thought, the numbness and itchiness became unbearable, he didn't care about the situation he was in and stretched out his arm to scratch it. But after only one scratch, he felt his heart starting to feel itchy and irritated, he couldn't stop himself from calling out and falling down onto the floor.

The potency of the poison on the Ancient Tomb's Jade Bee Needles was rarely seen in the world, just one little needle would cause unbearable pain. Never mind the fact that in the middle of battle, his blood was flowing around quickly and he was struck by several needles.

Da'erba took a large step forward and picked up his apprentice brother and placed him in his master's arms. He turned around to Yang Guo and said, "Little kid, I've come to fight you!"

The golden rod swept forwards, aiming towards Yang Guo's waist.

A golden light was carried forward with this sweeping rod. The golden rod was extremely heavy, as soon he used it, the golden light could be seen; his natural strength was great, his movements were quick. Yang Guo's legs didn't move, he bent his waist in a few inches and the golden rod brushed

past him. Who could have known that Da'erba wouldn't wait for the golden rod to finish the sweep, his wrist used some force, and the sweeping force of the golden rod turned into a thrusting one, moving towards Yang Guo's waist. With such a heavy weapon and such heavy and fierce stances, the ability to suddenly change direction midway was completely unexpected by everyone, Yang Guo too was shocked, he quickly pushed his sword against the rod and used its force to fly away.

Da'erba didn't wait for him to land, he followed up with another attack; Yang Guo's sword landed on the rod again and he flew away for a second time. Da'erba called out, "Where can you run?" The golden rod attacked again. Yang Guo's body was in midair, it was not convenient for him to do anything; he saw that he was in an extremely dangerous situation and decided to test his luck and take a risk. He stretched out his arm and grabbed the golden rod, hacking down with his sword at the same time. If he had the strength of Diancang Yuyin, then the opponent would have definitely let go. The reality was that Da'erba was much stronger than him; he pulled back and quickly retreated. Yang Guo took a chance and landed lightly on the ground. He was forced into the air three times in succession; his life really was within a space of a breath, though he didn't manage to take away the opponent's weapon, he had escaped the danger. The crowd all breathed out a sigh of relief.

Da'erba saw that his lightness kung fu was excellent and his stances lively, he said, "This kid's kung fu is not bad at all, who taught you?" He said this in Tibetan, of course Yang Guo would not understand. He had assumed that the monk was insulting him, and so copied what he said. The tone was perfect, there wasn't a mistake in the order of the words, in the ears of Da'erba, he heard, "This kid's kung fu is not bad

at all, who taught you?" So he replied, "My Master is Jinlun Fawang. I am not a little kid; you should call me big monk."

Yang Guo didn't want to suffer or be the receiving end of anything, he thought, "I don't care how you insult me, all I've got to do is give back what I get and I won't lose out to him. You call me a bastard, a pig, a pig in another language; I'll do the same to you." He concentrated on what he said and when he finished, he repeated in Tibetan, "My Master is Jinlun Fawang. I am not a little kid; you should call me big monk."

Da'erba was surprised, he looked up and down at him, he's definitely a little kid; how could he be a big monk? And how could your Master be Jinlun Fawang? So he said, "I am Fawang's first generation disciple. What generation are you?"

Yang Guo repeated, "I am Fawang's first generation disciple. What generation are you?"

In the Lama schools of Tibet, they had always talked about reincarnation, especially the reincarnation of the Da Lai and Ban Chan (religious figures of the lama Buddhists) back into this world; the disciples of the lama schools all believed in reincarnation without any doubts.

When Jinlun Fawang was young, he had taken in a disciple; that disciple died before he was twenty. Da'erba and Huo Dou had never seen him, they just knew about this matter. Da'erba is Fawang's second disciple, and Huo Dou the third, that was it. When Da'erba heard these words, he knew that it was his apprentice brother reincarnated, and he thought that if it wasn't him reincarnated, then how could this young kid have such high martial arts? Anyway, how would a young central plains kid know such good Tibetan? He slanted his head and studied him for a while; the more he

thought, the more likely it seemed to be true. He suddenly flung his golden rod away; he lowered his head and bowed to Yang Guo, he said, "Senior apprentice brother, junior apprentice brother Da'erba greets you."

Yang Guo was surprised with what just had happened, he thought that the monk couldn't beat him verbally so lowered his head in defeat. He saw that the monk was extremely respectful to him and his words were definitely not insults. They were words of respect, there was no need to copy him and so he nodded and smiled, showing that he accepted Da'erba's words.

The crowd was even more surprised, they didn't understand Tibetan; they didn't know what Yang Guo and the monk were jabbering on about. After talking for a while, he actually managed to tame this monk of terrifyingly divine strength.

Only Jinlun Fawang understood what was happening, he knew that his disciple, always straight and simple, had fallen into Yang Guo's trap; so he loudly said, "Da'erba, he's not your reincarnated apprentice brother, go and fight him."

Da'erba leapt up in shock and said, "Master, I think he must be apprentice brother, otherwise, at such a young age, how could he have such a high level of martial arts?"

Jinlun Fawang said, "Your apprentice brother's martial arts were much better than yours; that kid is not a match for you."

Da'erba shook his head, not believing him. Jinlun Fawang knew that he was very simple, he wouldn't understand straight away so he said, "If you don't believe it, go and test him out."

Da'erba has always treated his Master's orders as orders from above; since he said that Yang Guo was not his apprentice brother reincarnated then most probably he was not. But he had such high martial arts at such a young age, and said that he was his apprentice brother; it was difficult for him to not believe, but he followed his Master's orders to go and test out the kid's kung fu. The truth would be revealed by whoever wins or loses so he raised his hand to Yang Guo and said, "I'm going to duel with you, victory will decide whether this is the truth or not."

Yang Guo saw him stand up and say a few words, he looked very respectful. The words must be of a polite nature so he repeated what he said flawlessly, Da'erba heard, "I'm going to duel with you, victory will decide whether this is the truth or not." When he heard those words he felt very frightened, "Master said senior apprentice brother's martial arts were much better than mine, I definitely won't be able to compete with him."

Yang Guo saw that there were signs of fear on his face, he thought, "I'll give him another scare and send him away." So he said, "You have five disciples, they are called the 'Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border'; a few days ago they were rude towards me on the top of Mount Hua, and I crippled their kung fu. Are those punks still alive?" He spoke in Chinese, of course Da'erba would not understand, so he got one of the Mongolian warriors to translate for him. When Da'erba heard this, he was even more frightened. After the 'Five Clowns of the Tibetan Border' had their bodies' crippled by Ouyang Feng and Hong Qigong, when they returned to him, they weren't even able to speak. When Da'erba examined their injuries, he thought that even his master Jinlun Fawang didn't have such high internal energy to destroy the five's veins yet still keep them alive. The thing that did this must have the ability to move heaven and

earth; it could only be a god or a demon. How would he know that Ouyang Feng and Hong Qigong's internal energy was not below his master's; with the two combined, the internal energy would be twice as strong as Jinlun Fawang's. When he heard this, his fear flourished even more, he turned around and looked at Jinlun Fawang. He saw that there was an angry expression on his face, he didn't dare to not exchange blows with Yang Guo, he could only say, "Please hold back."

Yang Guo copied his Tibetan and said, "Please hold back."

Guo Fu saw the two of them speaking in Tibetan without pause, she went over to Huang Rong and said, "Mother, what are they saying?"

Huang Rong knew that Yang Guo was just copying what Da'erba had said, doing what children do to annoy other people, but she didn't understand why Da'erba had bowed to him. When she heard her daughter ask about this, she just gave an 'en' sound and said "Brother Yang is joking with him!"

Just at this point, Da'erba suddenly swept his golden rod out towards Yang Guo; he thought that since he's made it clear, the opponent would have been prepared. But Yang Guo had seen that he had a respectful expression on him, he didn't predict that he would suddenly lash out; this attack almost hit him, he leapt back urgently to avoid it.

He quickly retreated and hurried forward, immediately unleashing three strokes with the sword. Fear was in Da'erba's heart, he was afraid that his apprentice brother had learnt frightening martial arts from his master, and now that he's reincarnated, he would have even greater abilities. He just defended with his golden rod, not daring to make a single mistake. Many moves passed and Yang Guo

could see that he was just defending and not attacking. Though he didn't understand what was meant by this, he launched himself forward; he floated and darted around, a thrust from the east, an attack from the west, the "Jade Maiden Sword Techniques" were used with a clear gallant air and a flourishing beauty.

Over a hundred stances were exchanged, Jinlun Fawang was becoming impatient with the events and shouted, "Da'erba, quickly counterattack, he's not your senior apprentice brother!"

Da'erba's martial arts were well above Yang Guo's but because there was fear in his heart, he only used half of his abilities, whereas Yang Guo took the chance and fought with everything he had. One of them wanted to take the upper hand, the other kept on retreating and allowing the opponent to attack. Though Yang Guo had the advantage, he was unable to harm him; this convinced Da'erba further and he thought that his apprentice brother was holding back.

Jinlun Fawang was furious and loudly shouted, "Counterattack now!" This line was said with a surprising ferociousness, it caused ringing in the ears of the people watching. Da'erba didn't dare to defy his Master's orders; he straightened his golden rod and immediately attacked ferociously.

This ferocious attack forced Yang Guo to go on the defensive; he kept on dodging and darted around, the weaknesses in his stances were gradually beginning to show up. Da'erba saw that his sword stances were slightly loose and flung his rod towards it, Yang Guo couldn't pull back in time and the two collided. In a duel, weapons clashing were a regular event, but the rod was too heavy, Yang Guo's sword had kept its distance, not daring to

collide with the golden rod. Now when the weapons collided, he felt a sudden surge of a great force, shaking and causing him pain, a 'pai' sound was heard and the iron sword was snapped in two.

Da'erba called out, "I'm the victor!" He pulled back his rod and placed it on the ground vertically, his arms folded and bowed to him. Though he won, he didn't dare to lose his manners in front of his senior apprentice brother.

Yang Guo also used Tibetan to say, "I'm the victor!" He shot the broken sword towards him.

Da'erba moved his body to avoid it, he was alarmed, "How did senior apprentice brother win? Could it be that stance was a decoy, a trap? He saw Yang Guo dashing forward empty handed moving his hands; Da'erba didn't dare to hesitate and quickly used his golden rod to protect his body.

In the ancient tomb, Yang Guo learned palm techniques from Xiao Longnu; he reached a state where his two palms could keep eighty one sparrows within his control, not letting one fly away. This "Force of Nets Above and Snares Below" is a secret skill of Lin Chaoying's; it had never left Mount Zhongnan one-step. Now as it was used, indeed it was extremely soft, continuous and unyielding, though he was empty handed, the power of it was not inferior to the power he had when he was equipped with a sword. Da'erba's golden rod created gusts of winds as he used it, but Yang Guo used extremely high lightness kung fu to move around within the spaces of the rod. Though danger was always within a hair's breadth, the golden rod was not able to touch him at all. He clawed, hacked, slashed and chopped, within his little trapping hand stances as he used the "Force of Nets Above and Snares Below" for attack after attack.

After another while, Da'erba's strength increased, Yang Guo too got quicker and nimbler. During his time in the ancient tomb, he had refined his internal energy on the chilled jade bed, now in the middle of battle, the internal energy he spent years refining surged forward and showed itself.

Xiao Longnu sat on the stone rock next to the pillar with a slight smile on her face as she watched the two fight. She saw that Yang Guo had fought for a long time without losing, from her pockets, she took out a pair of snow white gloves and called out, "Guo Er, catch them!" Her right hand waved out and shot the gloves towards Yang Guo.

The pair of white gloves was made from very fine and very strong white gold silk, though it was thin, no type of precious blades or sharp swords could harm it.

When Hao Datong saw the white gloves in the air, his face changed slightly. Years ago at Chongyang Palace, Xiao Longnu wore these gloves to break his sword, forcing him to almost commit suicide. When he saw them again, he couldn't stop himself from being disturbed.

Yang Guo caught the gloves, retreated a step, and he quickly put them on. He used the Ancient Tomb's sect most ingenious and exquisite kung fu the "Beautiful Maiden Fist". He had used a few stances from this fist technique before to help Lu Wushuang against her enemies; forcing the Beggar Clan members to retreat. Every stance of this technique is meant to take on the aura and impression of a famous beautiful woman of the past. Originally, when a male uses it, the stances do not look elegant at all. But when Yang Guo was studying this technique he had changed some of the appearance of the stances; the names and fist techniques were the same, but in the interval between

palms and kicks, he changed its delicate and enchanting air into something graceful and stylish.

The heroes who were watching became even more perplexed; they saw him suddenly move and then suddenly stop; his expression and aura changing, it was extremely mystifying.

A woman's state of mind goes through many things, many changes. Along with the different extraordinary characters of each of the famous historic woman, came laughter, as brows were knitted, joy with worry; it was even more difficult to understand and surmise. Incorporating the hundreds and thousand year old feelings of these beautiful woman into martial arts, and then adding stances that reflect the beauty of goddesses, the mystery surrounding angels; how could ordinary people understand it?

Yang Guo used a stance of "Hong Yu Beats the Drum" his two arms attacking one after the other; Da'erba raised his rod and attacked. Yang Guo changed into "Hong Fu Hurries in the Night", unexpectedly he charged forward. Da'erba pushed his rod down vertically to block it. Yang Guo suddenly used "Luu Zhu's Falling Building"; he threw himself onto the ground and attacked his lower body.

Da'erba was shocked and thought, "How come senior apprentice brother's stances are so hard to comprehend?" He quickly leapt up and avoided his left palm's hack. Yang Guo's palms kept on attacking downwards without stop; it was the stance of "Wen Ji Returns to Her Man", in total there were eighteen palms.

Every stance of his had a background to it; Da'erba is a Tibetan monk, so how could he know about these histories of the central plains? In a flash he was forced to suddenly go high and then low, east and then west, his arms and legs

were all over the place. With the Golden Silk Gloves, whenever Yang Guo had the chance he would use the stances “Hong Xian Steals the Box”, “Mu Lan Curved Bow”, “Ban Ji’s Poem” and “Chang E Steals Medicine” to snatch away Da’erba’s golden rod, forcing him to roar incessantly, looking embarrassed. The heroes were delighted and called out and cheered to support him.

Jinlun Fawang saw that his disciple’s martial arts were definitely better than this young man’s, but because he was afraid, he kept on allowing the opponent to attack and was forced back embarrassingly. He shouted with a stern tone, “Quickly use the “Supreme Strength Rod Technique”!”

Da’erba replied, “Yes!” He held the rod’s handle with one hand and started to move it around. Using one hand to move the rod was already frightening, now he used the strength in his two hands and the strength in his waist at the same time; the gusts of winds created by the rod were even louder.

The “Supreme Strength Rod Technique” does not have many variations; there are only eight sweeping stances, and eight thrusting stances, sixteen stances in total, but when the sixteen stances were used repeatedly, sweeping and thrusting, it forced Yang Guo farther away as he avoided it. He didn’t dare to meet the gusts of wind created by the rod let alone meeting the rod itself.

After Diancang Yuyin’s oar broke, he had refused to accept his defeat, but when he saw the power of the “Supreme Strength Rod Technique”, he pondered on the fact that his oar stances did not contain anything as fierce and wild as this, he couldn’t help but give his respect to him.

After another period of fighting, several candles in the main hall were extinguished by the wind created by Da’erba’s

rod. Yang Guo just used his lightness kung fu to leap and jump around all over the place, just dodging and evading, but now that he was concentrating on avoiding the rod attacks, how could he attack? All of the heroes of the central plains were afraid and didn't make a sound, the Mongolian warriors all cheered thunderously.

Yang Guo was faced with no other choice but to keep on retreating, in a short time he was forced into the corner of the hall. He wanted to change his stances but there was no way for him to do so.

This "Supreme Strength Rod Technique" causes one to carry some degree of blind fury, once this became evident in Da'erba, he forgot that he was fighting his reincarnated senior apprentice brother. He saw that Yang Guo had nowhere else to retreat, and then shouted out, "Die!" The golden rod swept across, a ferocious explosion noise was heard, smoke and dust filled the air, and a large hole was made in the wall of hall.

In this extremely perilous situation, Yang Guo managed to leap over his head and even in this extreme situation he did not forget to repeat what he said in Tibetan, "Die!" That leap was a technique from the "Nine Yin Manual". He and Xiao Longnu had studied the markings of the manual left by Wang Chongyang on the ceiling of the stone chamber in the ancient tomb. They had learned some of the fist, kick and sword techniques but there was no one to advise them on practicing the internal aspect. They practiced it but they did not know if they practiced properly, right now he was facing a formidable enemy, how could he dare use it? He would never have thought that in the face of such a danger, he would use it naturally, saving his life in the process.

The crowd all thought that Da'erba would definitely hit his target with this stance; Guo Jing did not wait for the sweep

to hit its target and dashed out, wanting to grab his back. He saw a red flash in front of his eyes; Jinlun Fawang's palm was coming towards him. Guo Jing saw that the palm was coming in extremely fast so he quickly used a stance of "Seeing the Dragon in the Field". The two of them did not make a sound as the palms clashed; two flashes were seen as the two separated.

Guo Jing took three steps back while Jinlun Fawang stood his ground steadily. His strength was much stronger than Guo Jing's and his internal energy was profound, but the proficiency of his palms could not compare with Guo Jing's. Guo Jing took the steps back to disperse the enemy's force and avoid injury. But Jinlun Fawang was too proud; he forced himself to meet this palm solidly, enduring the pain in his chest, as he stood there without moving. Even great fighters such as Guo Jing and Jinlun Fawang thought that Yang Guo would definitely meet danger, so one of them flew out to save him; one of them came out to hinder the help. Who would have known that Yang Guo would use such an extraordinary stance, escaping in the space where the golden rod was sweeping next to his body. When the two of them saw that he avoided danger, both were surprised, one was comforted, the other lamented, and both of them retreated.

Da'erba didn't turn around after this failed attack; he swept the golden rod backwards fiercely. Yang Guo saw that this stance was coming in extremely quickly and automatically, he brushed across the floor like a sparrow gliding, he was a foot or so off the floor, going across it evenly, avoiding the golden rod with a few inches to spare. Again, this was kung fu from the "Nine Yin Manual".

Huang Rong was surprised and said, "Brother Jing, how come Guo'er knows the "Nine Yin Manual"? Did you teach him?" She thought that Guo Jing had taught Yang Guo the

“Nine Yin Manual” on the way to Mount Zhongnan out of his feelings and memories of the past.

Guo Jing said, “No, if I did teach him, why would I keep it from you?”

Huang Rong gave an ‘en’ sound; she knew that her husband had always told the truth to other people, towards her he was even more truthful. She saw Yang Guo shifting and moving, every time he was in danger he would rely on the martial arts of the “Nine Yin Manual” to protect himself. But he showed that he had yet to completely master it, he didn’t know how to counterattack according to the manual to achieve victory. Though he was able to protect his life, as the battle continues, he would still end up losing.

Huang Rong sighed to herself, “Guo’er is really an extraordinary talent, if he followed me for a year or so and learns the “Dog Beating Stick Technique” and “Nine Yin Manual” completely, how on earth would this Tibetan monk be a match for him?”

At this troubled time, she glanced over at a space and saw the Beggar Clan traitor Elder Peng in the midst of the Mongolian warriors, his face full of joy. She suddenly had an idea and called out, “Guo’er, “Soul Altering Spell”, “Soul Altering Spell”!”

The “Nine Yin Manual” has a technique called the “Soul Altering Spell”, using the power of the heart and soul to subdue the enemy and achieve victory. Years ago at the Beggar Clan meeting on Mount Jun, Huang Rong had used this technique to subdue Elder Peng’s hypnotizing “Fearful Heart Art”; because of this, when she saw this person she thought of it.

Yang Guo remembered the method of using the “Soul Altering Spell”; he didn’t have the confidence to completely

focus on the enemy and subdue them to gain victory so he had never practiced it. But he was conscious of Huang Rong's abilities, he thought, "Since Auntie Guo mentions this, there must be a reason, anyway, defeat is already definite so I might as well give it a try."

So his body continued avoiding the attacks, in his mind however he was purging his thoughts, following the method stated in the manual, from 'controlling the limits of the mind' to 'the limits of the real body'; everything became one, there weren't any other thoughts in his mind. At this time, he relied on his natural reactions, when he heard anything he leapt and darted, when he felt the gust of wind he hurriedly dodged it, his eyes fixed on the opponent.

More stances passed, Da'erba suddenly felt something was wrong with Yang Guo's movements; he glanced at him and then sent his golden rod forward fiercely.

Yang Guo used another stance of the "Beautiful Maiden Fist", "Man's Fine Waist", his waist swung lightly to avoid the attack. As he's using the "Soul Altering Spell", his body and mind have become one, whatever stances his hands and feet are using, then the face will reflect whatever feeling and aura the stances exude.

Da'erba saw that his face suddenly seemed to look like a scroll of literature, how on earth could he know that Yang Guo was copying the posture of the Tang's dynasty poet Zhu Letian's concubine Xiao Man' He couldn't stop himself from being taken aback, the golden rod attacked forward towards his head. Yang Guo moved his head to avoid it, he spread his five fingers and brushed it through his hair, his five fingers then gently waved out, a slight smile on his face; it was a stance of "Dressing of Li Hua". Zhang Lihua was Li Hou's favorite imperial concubine, her hair was seven feet long, its light could reflect people, because of her, Li Hou

abandoned his political duty and let the country go to ruin; her beauty was immensely enchanting.

Yang Guo's smile infected Da'erba, he followed and smiled. Yang Guo's face was handsome and striking, when he smiled, he was even more so, Da'erba's cheekbones were high and his cheeks deep, when the crowd saw him follow Yang Guo and smile, all of them shivered.

Yang Guo saw that he was taken aback and stretched out his finger, jabbing out; it was the stance "The Divine Needle Ping Ji". Da'erba slanted his body and moved away, his face copied Yang Guo's in making an expression that one has when concentrating on sewing.

Huang Rong saw that Yang Guo understood her and managed to affect the opponent using the "Soul Altering Spell", she was delighted; she whispered to Guo Jing, "Guo'er is extraordinary; when you were his age you didn't have such a level of kung fu."

Guo Jing expressed his joy, he nodded his head and concentrated on the two people in the middle of the hall without blinking.

The "Soul Altering Spell" uses the power of the heart and soul to affect the opponent; if the opponent's mind and will was strong and still, it would not be effective. If the opponent's internal energy was higher as well, the attack would be reflected back towards the user and they, instead, would fall under the control of the other person. When two people are dueling, if the user's martial arts were better than the other person's, then they could defeat them through weaponry, fists and kicks. There would be no need to resort to this technique. If on the other hand the user's internal energy was weaker, they wouldn't dare use this technique hastily. Though this technique is deep and

profound, it didn't have much use when facing a superior enemy.

Da'erba had heard Yang Guo speak a whole lot of Tibetan and had believed with some certainty that he was the reincarnation of his senior apprentice brother, but because there was fear in his heart, he was affected very quickly by this technique. Yang Guo was able to succeed in one go; if the target was Huo Dou, Yang Guo would definitely be in danger because he had never practiced this technique before and his internal energy could not match Huo Dou's.

Yang Guo performed the "Beautiful Maiden Fist", whatever he did, whether his steps made lotuses or he moved like a willow, Da'erba copied. The watching crowd was startled and amused.

Guo Fu had felt this was extremely amusing, she said to her mother, "Mother, this technique of brother Yang is really something, why don't you teach me?"

Huang Rong said, "If you learned the "Soul Altering Spell", heaven and earth would definitely be turned upside down; it would be trouble, you would suffer and so would others." She held her hand and said seriously, "Don't think this is fun, brother Yang and that monk are fighting with their lives; this is much more dangerous than fighting with sabers and swords!"

Guo Fu stuck her tongue out and watched Yang Guo, she still felt this was fun, when Yang Guo smiled, so did Da'erba, when Yang Guo was angry Da'erba was angry, so she copied him. How would she know how powerful the "Soul Affecting Spell" was, she copied just two movements when her heart and mind became unclear and blurred, and she started to take steps towards the centre of the hall.

Huang Rong was shocked and quickly pulled her hand. At this time, Guo Fu was being controlled and used her strength to fling her mother away. Huang Rong twisted her hand and Guo Fu's wrist, turning her face around, stopping her from facing Yang Guo. Guo Fu struggled for a bit, the hold restricted her vein's movements, she fainted and fell unconscious into her mother's arms.

Right now, Da'erba was completely controlled by Yang Guo, when he saw Yang Guo use a stance of "Xi Zi Offers the Heart" immediately followed by "Dong Shi Knits her Brows", then another stance of "Descending Goddess' Subtle Step", he copied the steps and scurries, "Gliding like a frightened Crow, Slithering like a slippery Snake".

Jinlun Fawang had noticed something was wrong long ago, he had called out many times but Da'erba acted like he didn't hear. Yang Guo saw that time had come, he suddenly used a stance of "Cao Ling Slices her Nose", and he waved his hand and cut a palm across his face, a left palm cut across followed by a right without stop.

In ancient times, a man called Cao Wenshu had a wife whose last name was Ling, after her husband died; she cut off her nose, showing that she will never marry again.

This stance originally uses the cut across the face to repel an enemy's attack, however, Yang Guo had made the cuts closer to his face by a few inches, cutting across his cheeks, it looked like it was a very heavy blow but in reality he just lightly brushed across his face. But how would Da'erba know this, his palms attacked his own face with the great force. He possessed frightening strength, every palm had a force of over a hundred kilos (220lbs), over ten palms later, he couldn't stand it, and he knocked himself dizzily to the floor.

Yang Guo quietly retreated a few steps and sat next to Xiao Longnu, his right hand supported his cheek, his left waved out lightly; he gave a long sigh, a lonely feeling on his face. This was the last stance of the “Beautiful Maiden Fist”, it’s called “Secluded in the Ancient Tomb” but this stance was invented by Yang Guo himself, Lin Chaoying did not know about this and Xiao Longnu too, did not know it. When Yang Guo completed learning the “Beautiful Maiden Fist”, he thought about how Ancestor Grandma excelled in beauty and grace, she did not lose compared to beauties of the ancient times, she was not in this fist technique, the beauty aspect is not really complete, so he devised his own stance. Though he said he invented this stance because of Lin Chaoying, the aura and feeling of this stance was that of his master Xiao Longnu. When Xiao Longnu first saw this, she just gave a little smile and let him be.

The heroes all cheered out in delight and called out, “We’ve won the second round as well!” “The position of Chancellor of Wulin belongs to the skilled fighters of the Song!” “You Mongols better crawl out of here and don’t show your face again in the central plains!”

The Mongolian warriors dashed out during this commotion and carried Da’erba back.

Jinlun Fawang saw that his two disciples had lost but not because their kung fu wasn’t good enough, they lost in some stupid way. He was furious but his face showed no signs of emotion, he sat on the chair and called out, “Young man, who is your Master?” Apart from excelling in martial arts, he was also knowledgeable in many things; he even knew how to speak Chinese.

Yang Guo pointed to Xiao Longnu and laughed as he said, “This is my Master, come and bow down to the Chancellor of Wulin!”

Jinlun Fawang saw that Xiao Longnu was beautiful and delicate, she was younger than Yang Guo, he did not believe that she was his master and thought, "The Han of the central plains are very sly and crafty but can you trick me?" He suddenly stood up; a clanking sound was heard as he took out a gold wheel from his compartment. The golden wheel was a foot and a half in diameter, cast out of solid gold, the Tibetan scriptures were inscribed on the wheel, in the middle were nine little spheres, a shake of the hands and a prolonged noise was heard.

Jinlun Fawang pointed to Xiao Longnu and said, "Huh, how is that this little girl is worthy of being the Chancellor of Wulin? If you can withstand ten stances of my golden wheel I'll acknowledge you as the Chancellor of Wulin."

Yang Guo laughed and said, "I've already won two rounds, two out of three, and your side said that at the start, so why are you trying to deny it?"

Jinlun Fawang said, "I want to test out her kung fu and see if she has the ability to take this task on."

Xiao Longnu did not know that Jinlun Fawang's abilities are shockingly brilliant, neither did she know what the Chancellor of Wulin was, the thought of whether to take this on had never crossed her mind. When she heard him say that he wanted to test whether she can withstand ten stances of his golden wheel, she stood up and said, "In that case I'll have a try."

Jinlun Fawang said, "If you can't withstand ten stances, what then?"

Xiao Longnu said, "If I can't, I can't, what about it?" Though she treated Yang Guo with love and compassion, when it comes to other things she didn't have a care.

The heroes of the central plains and the Mongolian warriors did not know that this was her character, and they saw that she didn't give Jinlun Fawang any consideration; they thought that she really must possess deep and profound martial arts. After seeing Yang Guo use the "Soul Altering Spell", others thought that she knew witchcraft and was a young witch. At that time, they all burst into conversation.

Jinlun Fawang really was afraid that she knew witchcraft, he started to chant a mantra, "ji li gu lu, ji li gu lu", he recited the "Devil Subduing Mantra" from the Tibetan scriptures. Yang Guo heard this and thought that the monk was insulting his master in Tibetan so he quickly concentrated and remembered every single word clearly. Once Jinlun Fawang finished reciting the mantra, from the golden wheel a period of 'lang lang' noises was heard, he shouted, "Young man, I'm about to start!" He said these two words in Chinese.

Yang Guo shook his hand, he didn't want to speak a word, he was afraid that once his concentration was disturbed, he would forget the passage of Tibetan he had just remembered, he then began to recite every word and tone of the passage.

Da'erba regained consciousness at this time, he saw that his master was holding a golden wheel and was about to fight someone. Then he heard Yang Guo recite the 'Devil Subduing Mantra' from the Tibetan scriptures, this was something that was kept within the school, and it was never passed on to outsiders. If Yang Guo wasn't the reincarnation of senior apprentice brother, how would he know this mantra? He quickly jumped up in urgency and knelt down in front of his master, he called out, "Master, he really is the reincarnation of senior apprentice brother, take him back into the school!"

Jinlun Fawang angrily said, "Rubbish! You don't even know that you've fallen into his trap."

Da'erba said, "It really is, this is the truth, it's definitely not a lie."

Fawang saw that he was confused; he picked him up by the back and flung him away. Da'erba weighed about a hundred kilos (220lbs); the way he was tossed lightly aside was as if he weighed nothing.

The heroes had seen the frightening strength of Da'erba when he fought Diancang Yuyin and Yang Guo, but the toss by Jinlun Fawang showed that his strength was even stronger. They looked at the delicate appearance of Xiao Longnu, without even mentioning the ten stances, if he just used force to blow at her, she would be blown over, and they couldn't stop themselves from worrying about her.

Many of the Mongolian warriors have seen Jinlun Fawang display his abilities, his skill could hold back ten thousand men, and his strength exceeded that of nine bulls. Though Xiao Longnu was the enemy, they saw that she was childlike, frail and beautiful. Even if she did know witchcraft, she may not be able to defend against the mysterious divine abilities of Jinlun Fawang. They couldn't stop themselves from secretly hoping that Fawang would not be too ruthless.

After Yang Guo finished reciting the mantra, he whispered to Xiao Longnu, "Gu Gu, be careful of that monk."

When Jinlun Fawang heard that Yang Guo had not recited one word wrong, he had respect for him, he praised him, "Young man, only you."

Yang Guo said, "Monk, only you."

Jinlun Fawang looked at him and said, "Only I what?"

Yang Guo said, "Only you've got the courage to fight with my Master, she is the reincarnation of the Goddess of Mercy; she has the ability to move heaven and earth, the power to subdue dragons and tigers, you better take care." He saw that this monk was very powerful, he wanted to make him worry so he won't fight with his full abilities, then it would be easier for his Master to defend against him.

But Jinlun Fawang is a hero that Tibet had never seen before; he excelled in both martial arts and the arts, how would he fall into the trap; he called out, "The first stance is coming, little miss, show your weapon!"

Yang Guo took off the golden silk gloves and put them on his Master before stepping back. Xiao Longnu took out a white silk belt from her pockets, the belt flew out and met the wind, a golden sphere was tied to the white belt. Something was inside the golden sphere, as the belt moved, the sphere rang like a bell, 'ding ling, ding ling', it was crisp and clear.

Everyone saw that the two's weapons were extremely strange, they thought that today they would really experience something, one weapon was extremely short, the other was extremely long, one extremely hard, the other extremely soft, and by coincidence, both weapons made 'ding dang' noises.

The golden wheel that Jinlun Fawang uses traps the opponent's weapon; no matter if it's a saber, sword, spear, lance, pike, whip or stick. When the weapon meets the wheel, they would be tangled up; when a normal person sends a stance over, the weapon in their hand will be lost. If he didn't see how impressive Yang Guo's martial arts were, he would never have said ten stances. In his life, very few

people have managed to take three stances of his golden wheel.

Xiao Longnu's belt flew out, she was attacking first.

Jinlun Fawang said, "What is this?" He sent out his left hand to grab the belt, he saw that the silk belt moving gently and swiftly, he knew that there would be many variations. That grab he sent out covered all directions, up, down, left, right and middle, wherever the belt goes, it would not escape his clutches. He couldn't have known that the golden sphere would counterattack, ringing as it moved, it was heading for his 'Central Islet' pressure point on the back of his hand. Jinlun Fawang was extremely swift in changing his stance, his palm turned around and went for the sphere again. Xiao Longnu's wrist moved slightly, the sphere turned around, moving up and down, aiming to strike his arm's 'Combined Valley' pressure point. Jinlun Fawang's palm turned again, this time he stretched out his two fingers to catch the sphere. Xiao Longnu understood what he was doing, the belt rushed forward slightly, the sphere went for the 'Crooked Marsh' pressure point around the elbow area.

Those few variations were done within just the turn of a hand, Jinlun Fawang turned his palm twice, Xiao Longnu twisted her wrist three times; the two had exchanged five stances.

Yang Guo understood what was happening and loudly counted, "One, two, three, four, five... that's five stances!" There are five stances left."

Jinlun Fawang wanted Xiao Longnu to take ten of his stances, wanting her to defend against ten of his attacks. Yang Guo tried to be clever and counted the stances exchanged by both sides. Jinlun Fawang is a leading master of martial arts, why would he allow himself to get into an

argument over numbers with this crafty young man? His left arm went to the side and avoided the sphere, and then sent his golden wheel forward.

Xiao Longnu heard the urgent 'lang lang' noise and saw a gold flash in front of her eyes, the enemy's golden wheel was now only a foot or so in front of her. This move was sudden, she couldn't even think about repelling this move, evading this attack was impossible. In this danger she flicked her wrist again, the silk belt went straight forward, the sphere attacked Fawang's 'Wind Pond' pressure point on the front of his head. This is a fatal pressure point, even if your martial arts were higher, once this point has been struck, your life would be at risk. She had no other choice but to use this risky stance of making both sides suffer great losses and to force the opponent to take back his wheel.

Indeed, Jinlun Fawang did not want to risk his life with her, he lowered his head to avoid the attack, but once his head was lowered, the wheel in his hand became slower. Xiao Longnu took this opportunity and summoned back her silk belt and a 'ding ding dang dang' sound was heard as the sphere collided with the golden wheel, neutralizing Jinlun Fawang's attack. All that happened in the blink of an eye, Xiao Longnu went from facing death to staying alive in a matter of seconds, she urgently utilized her lightness kung fu and retreated to the side, her face had a fearful expression.

Jinlun Fawang had just used one stance to attack but Yang Guo called out loudly, "Six, seven, eight, nine, ten... great, my master has received ten stances of yours, what more have you got to say?"

After that exchange, Jinlun Fawang knew that although Xiao Longnu's martial arts were high, it was nowhere near his

level. If they exchanged moves properly, he would definitely defeat her within ten stances. He did not like Yang Guo stirring the situation from the side, talking rubbish, and disturbing his concentration. He thought, "I'll ignore the young man's rubbish, I'll intensify my attacks and beat the little girl first and then reason with them." His sleeve carried forward and the golden wheel flashed, it was another extremely lethal fatal attack.

Yang Guo called out loudly, "You don't want face! Ten moves have passed and you're continuing, eleven, twelve, thirteen, and fourteen..." He didn't care how many stances were exchanged in defense and attack by the two, his mouth kept on counting up.

After receiving one of his stances, Xiao Longnu was extremely afraid; she didn't dare to receive another attack head on. She utilized her lightness kung fu and flew around the hall, the belt in her hand floating in the air, the golden sphere quickly turning, forming a streak of fog, a path of yellow light. The sounds that the golden sphere was producing sped up suddenly, slowed suddenly, lightened suddenly and loud suddenly, it was like a song. When she lived in the tomb, she studied the zither manuscripts left by Lin Chaoying and played the zither accordingly; she became rather wonderful with it. Later on, she started to practice with the silk belt and gold sphere, she noticed that the tones made by the sphere possessed a rhythm and tone, her character was still childlike then, and she managed to integrate music into this set of kung fu techniques.

Everything possesses a rhythm, from the way the world passes on, how trees and grass grow, to a person's heartbeat and pulse. Music is created by the natural manipulation of the sounds of nature by people; music pleases the ear whereas noise creates trouble in the heart. When kung fu and music is combined, it is performed even

more smoothly and softly, the body following whatever the mind wants.

The lightness kung fu of the Ancient Tomb sect belongs to its own class, other sects' lightness kung fu cannot compare with it. When using it in the open plains, it is difficult to identify the strong points of the technique, right now, it was being used in the hall, the grace and ease of it was unparalleled, moving in thousands of different directions. She has practiced her martial arts in the rooms of the ancient tomb, within a radius of over ten feet, she really did move like a goddess.

Though Jinlun Fawang's martial arts were much superior to hers, as she hurriedly leaped and suddenly shifted, there wasn't anything he could do about it. He heard the 'ding ling ding ling' sounds of the sphere was like a song, after listening to it a while, he found himself fighting along with the music. He quickly swung his golden wheel to create a noise, mixing up the 'ling' sounds. In a flash the room was filled with the clashing of the two sounds, suddenly it was soft then loud, high then low. The sounds from the bell was crisp and clear, when one hears them they felt carefree and joyous, the sounds that Jinlun Fawang produced were like metal being forged, like a scraping of a cauldron, like killing a pig, beating a dog, many indescribable noises.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong were watching from the side and remembered how years ago they heard Hong Qigong, Ouyang Feng and Huang Yaoshi use the sounds of music to battle with each other on Peach Blossom Island. As they reminisced about it, it felt like it was lifetime ago. Though the martial arts of the two were masterly, when it comes to using music to fight, they could not compare with Hong, Huang and Ouyang.

Yang Guo had already counted up to, "One thousand and five, one thousand and six, one thousand and seven..." But Xiao Longnu had kept away from facing her opponent; Jinlun Fawang had yet to use ten stances. Guo Fu was unconscious in her mother's arms but she was awakened by the sounds of the golden wheel, she raised her head, her face as dazed and she did not know what was going on.

Jinlun Fawang felt very impatient, he felt that with the status of a leading martial artist, if he was unable to beat this young girl after so long, and if the battle went on, he would eventually win but he would have lost all face. He suddenly stretched out his left arm, the golden wheel slanted across; his left palm pushed out low towards the left, the golden wheel went upwards towards the right. The two of them had fought for a long time, now Jinlun Fawang had grasped half of Xiao Longnu's lightness kung fu; those two attacks were meant to block her escape routes, only allowing her to move forward, escaping backwards was not an option.

In this danger, Xiao Longnu waved her silk belt and wrapped it around a group of white flowers, her body quickly flew up.

Fawang's golden wheel turned around, binding the silk belt. If it were a normal weapon, he would have taken it away long ago, but the silk belt did not have any stiffness, it just lightly slipped away from the hole of the golden wheel. Jinlun Fawang shouted, "That is the second stance, the third stance is coming!" He took a step forward; the golden wheel suddenly escaped from his hands, and was sent flying towards Xiao Longnu.

No one predicted that stance, the golden wheel spun urgently as it slashed towards Xiao Longnu. Xiao Longnu was extremely startled, she lowered her body and darted

backwards, she suddenly heard a 'chi chi' sound, a yellow light passed her face within an inch, the gusts of wind created by the wheel hurt her tender face.

In the startled calls of the crowd, Fawang dashed forward and stretched out his arm, his palm gave a push on the wheel's rim, turning it in midair, heading towards Xiao Longnu again. Xiao Longnu saw that the force the wheel was spinning with was extraordinary, how could she dare to use the silk belt to trap it? She could only use her matchless lightness kung fu to jump to the side to avoid it.

Jinlun Fawang had missed twice and called out, "Great lightness kung fu!" He dashed forwards and stretched out his left fist, a 'dang' sound was heard as he struck the wheel, at the same time he sent out both palms, blocking Xiao Longnu's path forward, while the golden wheel flew with a 'lang lang' sound towards the back of her head.

The golden wheel wasn't extremely quick, but before the wheel arrived, the gusts of wind created by the wheel moved towards Xiao Longnu, it was an extremely ferocious force. When Fawang punched the wheel, he had already calculated where the opponent could escape to, that is why the wheel seemed to have grown an eye; after making half a circle in midair, the wheel returned and headed for Xiao Longnu's back. Xiao Longnu jumped and used all the skills that she had learnt in her life, but she still saw the Tibetan monk's palms opened in front of her, blocking her way. The heroes' ears were filled with calls, their eyes were dazzled, and all of them had fear in their hearts.

Yang Guo saw that Xiao Longnu was in danger; he was extremely concerned and picked up Da'erba's golden rod. He used all his strength and flung it upwards towards the wheel, a loud 'dang' sound was heard, the rod managed to go through the wheel's opening in the middle, but the force

of the wheel was really ferocious, it shook his arms so much that his wrists split open, blood poured out, as he brought the wheel and rod crashing to the floor.

Xiao Longnu glanced over and saw that the wheel was on the floor, the threat from behind was taken away but her body was in midair, how could she avoid the enemy that was in front of her? She urgently waved out her silk belt, wrapping it around the pillar in the west and then pulled with all her strength, her body used this force to fly away towards the pillar, she smoothly and lightly slipped down behind the pillar, in the space of a hair's breadth, she managed to avoid Fawang's mountain shattering palm.

Jinlun Fawang had victory in his grasp but was again stopped by Yang Guo. Not only did the enemy get away, even his unbeatable weapon was knocked on to the floor by him; he has never experienced such a frustrating setback in his life. He originally was meticulous, wise and intelligent, yet right now he couldn't stop himself from reacting without thinking. He didn't wait for Yang Guo to get up and sent a palm chopping down on him.

According to his status as head of a school, what he was doing did not match how he had always thought of himself; Yang Guo was a junior, and he was on the floor when he sent out this palm, but in his great anger he couldn't care less.

Guo Jing saw him staring angrily at Yang Guo, his shoulder was raised and arm taken back, Guo Jing knew that he was about to kill him, he called out in quietly, "Oh no!" If he took a step forward, he would still be able to block this attack but Yang Guo would still suffer a serious injury. In this urgent situation there was no time to think carefully, he used a stance of "Flying Dragon in the Sky", his whole body leapt into the air, and attacked Jinlun Fawang's head. If

Jinlun Fawang didn't take back this palm, though he would be able to kill Yang Guo, his life would be taken away under the matchless lethal and swift Dragon Subduing Palm. The force of his palm quickly turned around, he gave a 'hei' shout, and exchanged palms with Guo Jing.

This was the second time that two great masters of the present time exchanged palms. Guo Jing was in midair and had nothing to brace against, he used the opponent's force and made a half somersault, landing backwards. Yet, Jinlun Fawang stood his ground steadily, his body didn't sway and his legs didn't shift, it was as if nothing had happened.

Hao Datong, Sun Bu'Er, Diancang Yuyin and the others knew about Guo Jing's kung fu; after they saw this they all were shocked, that monk's kung fu really is extraordinary.

In reality, Guo Jing was just following the orthodox rules of martial arts by retreating backwards, naturally dispersing the enemy's force.

After Yang Guo had interfered many times, Jinlun Fawang had lost face, he wanted to regain it back and so took Guo Jing's palm; he actually consumed a lot of his chi and internal energy, though he looked like he was superior, he was suffering on the inside. The two of them are outstanding men of the world; it would be difficult to separate the two in tens of moves. Jinlun Fawang forced himself to take this stance without moving, his chest throbbed with pain again, luckily the aim of the opponent was just to stop him and he did not continue to attack. He closed his lips and eyes and circulated his internal energy, unblocking the motionless chi in his chest.

Yang Guo escaped death and picked himself up, he hurried to Xiao Longnu's side, just as Xiao Longnu was about to come over and take a look at him. Both of them asked at the

same time, "Are you okay?" The two nodded at the same time, a smile was on their faces, their hands held each other's with joy in their hearts.

Yang Guo picked up the golden rod and placed the golden wheel on top, he rotated the wheel and it made 'lang lang' noises; he loudly called out, "All you Mongolian warriors listen; I've manage to take the weapon of your country's great protector, how can you still talk about being the Chancellor of Wulin? Go and crawl back to Mongolia you Mongolian asses!"

None of the Mongolian warriors accepted what had happened, they saw that Jinlun Fawang was about to win in the duel between him and Xiao Longnu, the opponents came up with not only Yang Guo, but Guo Jing as well, they all called out, "It was Fawang who flung the wheel away himself, how could a little punk like you take it?" "One versus one" and "without the help of others!" "Correct, fight again," They all made a clamor but it was all in Mongolian, apart from Guo Jing, no one understood what they were saying.

The heroes of the central plains were all reasonable and understanding people; they felt that when it comes to martial arts, Jinlun Fawang was indeed superior to Xiao Longnu. But they cannot allow a Mongolian to take the position of the Chancellor of Wulin; otherwise, the central plain's Wulin would have lost all its face. Before it actually began, the spirits of the amassed heroes who planned to defend against the foreign invaders had been dampened. The younger members of the crowd also began to argue and shout. When they heard the clamor of the Mongolian warriors, they began to quarrel with them. Both sides raised their weapons; the situation was developing into a mass brawl.

Yang Guo raised the golden rod and golden wheel; he said to Jinlun Fawang, "You still won't admit defeat? You have lost your weapons, what face have you got left? How can the world have a Wulin Chancellor whose weapon can be taken away by someone else?"

Jinlun Fawang was secretly circulating his internal energy right now, he heard every single word that Yang Guo said but he didn't dare to open his mouth and speak.

Yang Guo looked at the situation and knew what was happening, quickly, he loudly said, "All the heroes please can I have your attention: I'm going to ask him three times, if he doesn't reply then that means he admits defeat."

He was afraid that as time passes, Fawang will have finished circulating his internal energy, he didn't waste any time, he asked in one breath, "Did you or did you not lose? Are you still thinking about the position of the Chancellor of Wulin or not? If you don't say anything then that means you admit defeat, right?"

Fawang had just finished ridding the motionless chi, the pain in his chest had cleared up, he was about to reply when Yang Guo saw his lips move, he quickly got in ahead and said, "Fine, since you've admitted defeat we won't give you any trouble, you had better leave." He then raised the golden rod and golden wheel and handed them over to Guo Jing. He actually wanted to hand them over to his Master but was afraid that Jinlun Fawang's fury will erupt again; Xiao Longnu would not be able to block the attack.

Jinlun Fawang was so angry that his face swelled and turned purple. He was worried about how excellent Guo Jing's martial arts were; his weapon has also fallen into the enemy's hands. If he fights empty handed, it would be difficult for him to win. He also saw that there were many

martial artists of the central plains here, if it became a mass brawl, their side would definitely lose. A good man doesn't endure the suffering that's in front of him, he could only retreat first and come up with another plan. He loudly said, "The barbarians of the central plains are crafty and sly, they win due to numbers, they are not heroes and good men, let's go." His left hand waved and the Mongolian warriors all headed towards the exit. He made a departing motion towards Guo Jing from faraway, he said, "Hero Guo, Chief Huang, today I have experienced your great skills. The mountains will remain green, the rivers will flow, and we will meet again."

Guo Jing returned the gesture and bowed, he said, "Reverend's martial arts are deep and profound, I respect your abilities deeply. Please take back the weapons." As he said this, he offered the golden rod and wheel back.

Yang Guo loudly called out, "Jinlun Fawang, you are thinking about taking them back, do you want face?"

Guo Jing shouted, "Guo'er, stop talking rubbish." Jinlun Fawang had already turned around with his sleeve floating behind, he didn't look back as he exited the hall.

Yang Guo suddenly remembered something, he called out, "Hey, your disciple Huo Dou has contracted my poison, quickly bring the antidote to his poison and swap it with mine."

Jinlun Fawang had always thought very highly of his own abilities; mysterious and divine martial arts, profound medical knowledge, he can cure any poison. He had an extreme dislike for Yang Guo because of his slyness and craftiness, he ignored what he said and left.

Huang Rong saw that Zhu Ziliu had his eyes closed and was asleep, she considered that many of the people here are

experts in using poison projectiles, there would be someone who has the ability to cure this poison, and she wasn't too concerned with Jinlun Fawang's refusal.

Now, the Lu manor was filled with thunderous cheers and calls; all of it was for Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu defeating Jinlun Fawang. Hundreds of people were around the two, one word here and another word there. Some said that Yang Guo defeated Huo Dou in the way he deserved, dealing with a man as he deals with you. Others said that the speed and ease of Xiao Longnu's lightness kung fu was in a class of its own, actually managing to avoid the fierce and dangerous attacks of Jinlun Fawang. When it came to Yang Guo using the "Soul Altering Spell" to make Da'erba knock himself out, many of them did not understand what had happened. When someone asked about it, Yang Guo just made up a reply.

End of Chapter 13.

Chapter 14 - Defending against Custom and Tradition

Translated by Noodles



The upstairs of the restaurant became covered by a layer of broken wood. The three of them battled

on the debris without any obstructions. Jin Lun Fa Wang moved around in large steps, the iron wheel flashing around, 'lang lang' sounds were heard, his arms in motion as he attacked Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu two people ferociously.

The banquet opened again at the Lu manor, wine and many dishes were once again prepared. Yang Guo had suffered a lifetime of wrongs, mistreatment and being looked down upon, and today he had displayed himself well. He got rid of his anger, everyone's eyes were opened as he achieved great merit for the central plain's Wulin, he was extremely proud of himself.

Xiao Longnu did not understand the ways of the world, though she didn't understand the reason for Yang Guo's delight, she too was extremely happy. Huang Rong liked her very much, she held her hand as she asked short and long questions, wanting Xiao Longnu to sit next to her.

Xiao Longnu saw that Yang Guo was sitting in between Guo Jing and Diancang Yuyin, faraway from her, she quickly motioned her hand and said, "Guo'er, sit next to me."

But Yang Guo knew that girls and boys have their differences, at first when he saw her, he forgot about this and showed his true feelings, now in front of the glare of all these heroes, it would be improper to show this closeness again. When he heard her call out like this, he couldn't stop himself from blushing and smiled slightly but he didn't go over.

Xiao Longnu called out again; "Guo'er, why aren't you coming?"

Yang Guo said, "I'm fine over here, Uncle Guo is talking to me."

Xiao Longnu's elegant brows frowned and said, "I want you to sit next to me."

When Yang Guo saw her angry expression, his heart shook, that slightly angry look made him feel if he were to die, he would die willingly.

That day when he met Lu Wushuang, he used all his might to defend her against her enemies and protected her for thousands of miles because of the resemblance of her angry expression to Xiao Longnu's. Now the real person is here, how could he defy her? He immediately stood up and went over to her place.

The way the two acted made Huang Rong slightly suspicious. She ordered another chair and asked Yang Guo; "Guo'er, who taught you kung fu?"

Yang Guo pointed to Xiao Longnu and said, "She is my Master. Auntie Guo, why don't you believe me?"

Huang Rong knew that he was crafty and sly, she saw that Xiao Longnu was innocent and naïve, she thought that she wouldn't lie so she turned her head and asked her, "Sister, his kung fu was taught by you?"

Xiao Longnu was very proud and said, "Yes. Tell me, did I teach him well?"

Huang Rong now believed it and said, "Extremely well! Sister, who was your Master?"

Xiao Longnu said, "My Master is dead." As she said this, her eyes went red, she was feeling rather sad. Her Master had taught her to curb her emotions but now her love for Yang

Guo had surfaced, the emotions buried deeply within her heart also started to slowly show.

Huang Rong asked, "What is your Master's name?"

Xiao Longnu shook her head and said, "I don't know, Master is Master."

Huang Rong thought that she didn't want to say, refusing to mention the matters involving their sect's Master was common within the Wulin community so she didn't ask further.

In reality, her Master was just Lin Chaoying's maid, she only had the name that Lin Chaoying gave her, and even she herself did not know what her surname was.

At this time, all the heroes gave a toast towards Guo Jing, Huang Rong, Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu, celebrating the fact that they defeated such a strong opponent as Jinlun Fawang.

Because Guo Fu was always by her parent's side, she had the respect of others, right now she was being overshadowed, and she couldn't stop from feeling depressed. Apart from the Wu brothers by her side who revered her, no one took any notice of her. She felt annoyed, she said, "Big brother Wu, little Brother Wu, let's go outside and play instead of drinking wine."

Wu Dunru and Wu Xiuwen both agreed. The three of them stood up and were about to leave the hall when Guo Jing suddenly called out, "Fu'er, come over here." She turned her head and saw that her father had changed places and was now sitting at the same table as her mother, smiling and signaling her over so she went and called out, "Father, mother!" and leaned on Huang Rong.

Guo Jing smiled and said to Huang Rong, "At first you were worried about Guo'er's character and were afraid that his martial arts weren't up to scratch, you can't say anything now, can you? He has achieved a great merit for the heroes of Wulin, without saying that he hasn't done anything wrong. Even if he had, it cannot compare to what he has done today."

Huang Rong nodded, she smiled and said, "It was my mistake, Guo'er's character and martial arts both are good, I am very pleased as well."

Guo Jing heard that his wife had now agreed about their daughter's marriage and was delighted, he said to Xiao Longnu, "Miss Long, your disciple's father and I are sworn brothers. The Yang's and Guo's have had a great relationship for generations, I have a daughter, her beauty and martial arts are both passable..." He had always been straight forward, whatever is in his heart will be said.

Huang Rong interrupted, she smiled and said, "Ai ya, who praises their own child like that, you're not afraid of making sister Long laugh."

Guo Jing laughed and followed on, "I wish to betroth my daughter to your disciple. Both his parents have passed away, the responsibility of making the decision is now passed onto Miss Long. I want to take the opportunity with all these heroes here, to add another celebration on top of the last one. Let's ask two heroes of a venerable age and eminent virtue to be the matchmakers, and arrange the marriage, how about that?"

Marriage is decided by the orders of the parents and the words of the matchmakers, the boy and girl don't actually have a say. This is why, years ago, there was the matter of an arranged marriage decided by Guo Jing's father Guo

Xiaotian and Yang Guo's grandfather Yang Tiexin for their children. When Guo Jing said this, he laughed out loud and looked at Yang Guo and his daughter, thinking that Xiao Longnu will definitely agree to this. Guo Fu was already embarrassed, her face was red and she hid in her mother's arms, she felt this was inappropriate but she didn't dare to say anything.

Xiao Longnu's face changed slightly and before she replied, Yang Guo stood up and gave a prolonged bow to Guo Jing and Huang Rong and he said, "The gratitude that I have for Uncle Guo's and Auntie Guo's love and care would be impossible to repay. But nephew is from an ordinary family, my character is lowly, I am not worthy for your precious daughter."

Guo Jing thought that because he and his wife are famous throughout the Wulin world, and his daughter's character, beauty and kung fu are first class, now that he's personally saying that he wants to betroth her to him, he thought he would definitely be ecstatic. He couldn't have known that he would reject this, he couldn't help being startled. Then had another thought; it must be because he is young, it was unexpected and he wanted to postpone it. Guo Jing gave a laugh and said, "Guo'er, the two of us aren't exactly strangers, this matter involves your future, there is no need to be embarrassed."

Yang Guo gave another deep bow to him and said, "If Uncle Guo has any other requests, nephew here will oblige without delay. But I dare not comply with this request of marriage."

Guo Jing saw that his face was serious and he was surprised, he looked at his wife in hope that she would explain it.

Inside, Huang Rong blamed Guo Jing for being so straightforward. Without checking beforehand, he openly raised this matter in front of all these people, making a big mistake. She saw that the way Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo treated each other was like a couple in love, but they said they were Master and disciple, could it be that the two act in a manner contrary to the norm and have actually intermixed the relationships?

This was something that was extremely hard to believe, she thought that although Yang Guo may not be a man of honour, he would not do such a thing as this. The Song respect tradition above all; the relationship between Master and disciple were like that of an emperor and his minister, a father and son, they can never intermix. Though Huang Rong suspected it, this matter was so serious that she didn't dare to believe it so she asked Yang Guo, "Guo'er, Miss Long really is your Master?"

Yang Guo said, "Yes!"

Huang Rong asked again, "You've kowtowed and gone through the ceremony of entering a Master's tutelage?"

Yang Guo said, "Yes." His mouth was replying to Huang Rong but his eyes were fixed on Xiao Longnu, his face filled with joy, tenderness, love and affection. Without mentioning how clever and wise Huang Rong was, even an ordinary person could tell that the two's relationship was not a normal Master and disciple relationship.

Guo Jing did not understand what Huang Rong was doing, thinking, "He has already said that Miss Long is his Master, their kung fu is from the same school, what's untrue about that? I was talking about our daughter's marriage, why did Rong'er ask them whether they were Master and disciple again? Ah, he first entered Quanzhen sect and then entered

another sect later on, though it's not according to the rules of Wulin, it's not that difficult a thing to clear up.

Huang Rong was secretly alarmed at Yang Guo's and Xiao Longnu's expressions, she signaled with her eyes towards her husband and said, "Fu'er is still young; why is there a need to rush things? Today the heroes of the world are amassed here, it's more important to discuss how to protect the country. Let's put aside our personal matters."

Guo Jing thought this was correct so he quickly said, "Yes, yes. I almost put my personal affairs over public matters. Miss Long, we'll carry on discussing Guo'er's and my daughter's marriage at a later date."

Xiao Longnu shook her head, "I myself will be Guo'er's wife," she said, "He cannot take your daughter as his wife."

Those two sentences were crisp and clear, hundreds of people in the hall heard this. Guo Jing was startled, he stood up and didn't believe his eyes, he saw her holding Yang Guo's hand, looking affectionate towards him, he had to believe it, he stuttered, "He's... he's your disc... disc... disciple, could it be that he's not?"

Xiao Longnu had lived in the ancient tomb for a long time; she was not exposed to the sunlight, because of this there were no traces of color in her cheeks and her skin permanently white. But right now her heart was filled with joy and delight; her face looked tender and enchanting, just like when a flower first blooms. She smiled and said, "Yes! I taught him kung fu but now his kung fu is as strong as mine. He loves me in his heart and I love him. Before..." As she reached this point she lowered her voice, though she was very innocent, the embarrassment and shyness of girls began to show, she said gently, "Before... I thought that he didn't love me, he didn't want me to be his wife, my... my

heart was in unbearable pain and I thought death would be better. But today, I know that he really loves me, I... I..."

Hundreds of people in the hall were silent, listening to her revealing her feelings. Even if a girl is filled with love, how could she tell it all in public? And how could she tell it to Guo Jing who had nothing to do with it? But she does not know anything about customs, tradition and the conduct of others, she just felt that these words needed to be said and immediately came out with them.

Yang Guo was extremely moved by her words of love but he looked at the crowd, some were startled and surprised, some looked awkward and some did not approve. He thought that Xiao Longnu was too unknowing, she shouldn't have said this in this place, he pulled her hand and stood up, he softly said, "Gu Gu, let's leave!"

Xiao Longnu said, "Yes!"

The two of them headed towards the exit shoulder to shoulder, though the hall was filled with people, in Xiao Longnu's eyes there was only Yang Guo.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong looked at each other startled, the couple had been through countless strange events, endured many dangers, but they could never have predicted what was happening right now. For the time being, they didn't know what to do.

Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo were about to leave the hall when Huang Rong called out, "Miss Long, you're the Chancellor of Wulin, everyone is under your command, you need to think this over."

Xiao Longnu turned her head and showed a smile, she said, "I don't know how to be whatever Chancellor, sister if you want it, then you take the position."

Huang Rong said, "No, if you want to elect someone else, then you ought to elect senior Chief Hong."

The Chancellor of Wulin is the most revered position in the view of martial artists, but Xiao Longnu couldn't have cared less and just replied, "Just do whatever you want, I don't understand it anyway." She pulled Yang Guo's hand and headed for the exit again.

Suddenly there was a gust of wind, the candlelight swayed, and a person darted out. The person was dressed in a Taoist gown, a long sword in his hand; it was the Quanzhen Taoist Zhao Zhijing. He blocked the exit with his sword and said loudly, "Yang Guo, you disobeyed your Master and showed disrespect for Quanzhen's founder, and today you have done such a monstrous thing, how can you still have the nerve to stand on this earth? As long as Zhao has one breath in him, I will not allow it."

Yang Guo did not want to argue with this person in front of everyone, he deepened his voice and said, "Move!"

Zhao Zhijing said, "Apprentice brother Yin, come over, you have a say as well, that night on Mount Zhongnan we saw with our eyes two people naked, what's all that about?"

Yin Zhiping stood up shakily, his left arm rose. People could see that the last two fingers on his hand were missing; though they didn't know the intricacies of the situation, but judging from the way his body froze and the strange expression on his face, they knew that there must be something more to this.

That night, Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were practicing the "Jade Heart Manual" in the flower thicket when Zhao and Yin saw them. Yang Guo had forced Zhao Zhijing to take up a venomous oath, he couldn't tell this matter to a fifth person, how could he have known that today, Zhao Zhijing

would belittle and accuse them without restraint in front of everyone, Yang Guo was extremely furious, he shouted, "You swore an oath, you are forbidden to reveal this to a fifth person, why are you now... why..."

Zhao Zhijing laughed and said loudly, "Correct, I swore I won't reveal this to a fifth person but in front of me there is a sixth, a seventh. It's not a fifth person when there's hundreds and thousands present. Naturally, I can tell everyone about this immoral thing that you two did."

Zhao Zhijing had seen the two naked, in the middle of the night in a flower thicket, how could he think that they were practicing advanced martial arts? It came out now due to anger, and he didn't care if he was falsely accusing them or not.

That night, Xiao Longnu was so angry that she threw up a pool of blood, almost losing her life. Now she heard him twisting his words and arguing his way, she couldn't stand it any longer, she stretched out her hand and lightly grabbed his chest, she said, "You'd better stop talking rubbish." She had completed the "Jade Heart Manual" and now the palm came out of nowhere, that, plus the fact that the "Jade Heart Manual" is the Black Star (the matching opposite) of Quanzhen's kung fu made the move extraordinary. Xiao Longnu's hand had gone through Zhao Zhijing's urgent attempt to repel it, grabbing his chest.

Zhao Zhijing blocked thin air and was startled, but the opponent's palm just touched his chest briefly and then immediately departed, he didn't feel anything and didn't take it to heart, he chuckled and said, "Why are you touching me? I'm not..." Before he finished, he's eyes suddenly went blank, a 'peng' sound was heard as he fell onto the ground, he had suffered a severe injury.

When Sun Bu'Er and Hao Datong saw their martial nephew hurt, they dashed forward to see his chi and blood had been forced upwards, his face was completely red as if he was drunk. Sun Bu'Er chuckled and said, "Fine, your Ancient Tomb sect really wants to start something with my Quanzhen sect." She held out a long sword, about to start a fight with Xiao Longnu.

Guo Jing urgently got out of his seat and stood between the two, he said, "We're on the same side, stop this fighting." He said to Yang Guo, "Guo'er, both sides are your Master and elders. Advise them to return to their seats, and then we can quietly clear things up."

Xiao Longnu had never thought that such a thing as not keeping to your word and breaking a promise existed, she was really troubled, she pulled Yang Guo's hand with a frown, saying, "Guo'er, let's leave, we won't see these people ever again!" Yang Guo followed her lead and took two steps forward.

Sun Bu'Er's sword moved and she shouted, "You've hurt someone and now you want to leave?"

Guo Jing saw that both sides were about to fight, he said seriously, "Guo'er, you must stop your feet, you must be a good person, don't destroy yourself and your name. I was the one who named you; do you know what the word 'Guo' means?"

When Yang Guo heard this, his heart trembled, he suddenly remembered all the events from when he was a child, thinking about all the sad and painful events he's been through, and then he thought, "How come it was Uncle Guo who named me?"

Guo Jing loved Yang Guo very much, it was unavoidable that he would want to plead and scold him deeply and severely.

Today he saw Yang Guo show himself in front of all these heroes, he was feeling delight and content when he suddenly found out that Yang Guo had done something he should never have done. His heart was anxious and urgent, his tone was especially strict, he continued, "Your deceased mother must have told you this before, your name is 'Guo', what are the words that accompanies it?"

Yang Guo remembered that his mother had told him this before, but then he was young, no one had used these words in regards him, he himself almost forgot it. Yang Guo replied, "They're 'Gai Zhi'."

Guo Jing said with a severe tone, "Correct, and what does it mean?"

Yang Guo thought for a while and remembered the literature that Huang Rong had taught him when he was younger, he said, "Uncle Guo is saying that 'if I have made mistakes then I must correct them'."

Guo Jing's tone now became gentler, he said, "Guo'er, people make mistakes, mistakes can be changed; this is the greatest advice. They are the words of the first virtuous men and sages. You've been disrespectful towards your seniors; this is a big mistake, think well about it."

Yang Guo said, "If I was wrong, of course I would change. But he..." He pointed to Zhao Zhijing and said, "He beat me, insulted me, lied to me and hated me, how can he still be my Master? Gu Gu and I are clean and innocent, the day can be our witness. I respect her, and love her, could it be that's wrong?" He said this boldly, with justice on his side.

Guo Jing's intelligence and verbal ability couldn't compare with his, how could he argue with him? But he knew that his actions were very wrong yet he didn't know how to tell him clearly, he could only say, "This... this... you're wrong..."

Huang Rong walked forward slowly and softly said, "Guo'er, Uncle Guo is looking out for your well being, you must understand this."

Yang Guo was moved by her soft and gentle words; he lowered his voice and said, "I know that Uncle Guo has always treated me extremely well." His eyes became red, he almost cried.

Huang Rong said, "He's giving you sincere advice, don't take this the wrong way."

Yang Guo said, "I don't understand, what, exactly, have I done wrong?"

Huang Rong's face sank and said, "You really don't understand, or are you deliberately stirring things up?"

Yang Guo was angry in his heart, he thought, "You have treated me well, I have paid you back well, what more do you want from me?" He bit down on his lips and didn't reply.

Huang Rong said, "Fine, since you want me to tell you the truth, I won't go around in circles. Since Miss Long is your Master, she is your senior, you cannot be lovers."

This rule was not unheard of by Yang Guo as it was by Xiao Longnu, but he couldn't accept it; why couldn't Gu Gu be his wife just because she taught him some kung fu? Why even Uncle Guo doesn't believe that he and Gu Gu have done anything immoral? When he thought about this, his anger erupted. He was already someone who wasn't afraid of neither heaven nor earth; now that he's being accused, he was even bolder and loudly said, "What have I done that has hindered you people? Who have I hurt? Gu Gu has taught me kung fu but I still want her to be my wife. Even if you chop me up into a thousand pieces I will still want her to be my wife."

These words shocked and startled those who heard it. The Song at that time adhered to customs and traditions strictly; where on earth have they heard such fearless, wanton and rebellious logic? The person that Guo Jing respected the most was his Master, when he heard this, his anger erupted and he dashed forward, stretching out his arm, grabbing his chest.

Xiao Longnu was shocked and stretched out her hand to block this grab. Guo Jing's martial arts were much stronger than Xiao Longnu's and now he was furious; he used all his strength, a lead and a wave and he had flung her over ten feet away. He stretched out his arm and grabbed Yang Guo's 'Celestial Charge' pressure point; with his left hand raised he shouted, "You animal, you dare to say such heresy?"

Yang Guo's lost all his strength by this grab, but there wasn't a shred of fear in his heart, he said, "Gu Gu loves me with all her heart; I treat her the same way. Uncle Guo, if you want to kill me then do it. But I will never change my mind."

Guo Jing said, "I treat you like my own son, I cannot allow you to do wrong and not change."

Yang Guo said proudly and boldly, "I haven't done anything wrong! I haven't done anything bad! I haven't harmed anyone!" Those words were like the sounds of metal clanging.

Everyone's heart shook when they heard this; his words really did have some reason in them. If a Master and disciple didn't say anything and they got married on some remote island or deserted location then no one would know about it, it would not affect anyone. But publicly announcing

such a wrong really contradicts the mentality of the people of this time, and means becoming the scum of Wulin.

Guo Jing raised his palm and mournfully said, "Guo'er, my heart is in great pain, do you understand? I'd rather you die than let you do bad things, do you understand?" As he reached this point, his voice choked.

When Yang Guo heard him say this, he knew that if he didn't change what he said, Uncle Guo would kill him with one palm. Though he was crafty and sly at times, at this point, nothing could compare with his stubbornness, he said clearly, "I know I haven't done anything wrong, if you don't believe it then kill me."

Guo Jing raised his palm; what chance has he of living if the palm landed on his head? Everyone watched without making a sound, hundreds of eyes stared at his palm.

Guo Jing's palm stopped in midair for a second and he looked at Yang Guo again. He was biting down on his lips, his brows wrinkled. What Guo Jing saw was the picture of his father, Yang Kang, from years ago. His heart ached and he let out a long sigh, he loosened his right hand and said, "Think well about what you're doing." He turned around and went back to his place; he didn't take another glance at Yang Guo, his face was full of hurt and grief. He was extremely disheartened.

Xiao Longnu signaled to him with her hand and said, "Guo'er, these people are extremely unreasonable, let's go." She didn't know that just now, Yang Guo's life was hanging by a thread.

Yang Guo thought that the word 'unreasonable' was extremely apt, he stepped towards the exit, holding Xiao Longnu's hand as they went out. Outside the manor, they lead the skinny horse along as they made their way.

Everyone watched their backs as they left, a few were shocked, others despised them, some were regretful and a number of them were angry.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu walked shoulder to shoulder; it was deep into the night now. The two of them had finally reunited with each other; all the things that had happened today, the heated battle, the arguments, they were all clearly forgotten. They felt as though they were in heaven right now; all those wasted days they had lived apart before were in vain. Now there was no need to worry about the days that were to come. The two of them were linked to each other by thought; they didn't exchange a word as they walked on silently. The two arrived at a willow tree and sat down by the tree trunk. They gradually grew tired and fell asleep. The skinny horse was grazing on grass faraway, making quiet neighing noises.

The sky was bright when they woke up; the two looked at each other and smiled. Yang Guo said, "Gu Gu, where are we going?"

Xiao Longnu pondered for a while and said, "Let's go back to the tomb." Ever since she'd left the tomb she felt that, although outside was bustling and flourishing, it wasn't as carefree and comfortable as the tomb. Yang Guo was deep in thought, "If I could spend the rest of my life with Gu Gu in the tomb, I would have no other desires." Before, he longed for the outside world, hoping that she would let him leave the tomb but after going outside, he too longed for the quiet life in the tomb. The two of them slowly started to head north. One still called the other 'Guo'er', the other one still called the other 'Gu Gu', and they both felt that being together and calling each other this way felt the most natural.

By midday, the two started to talk about Jinlun Fawang's martial arts, they both said that his martial arts were excellent; it would be extremely hard to defend against it.

Xiao Longnu suddenly said, "Guo'er, we haven't completed the final stage of the "Jade Heart Manual", can you remember it?"

Yang Guo said, "I can remember it but we spent a lot of time pondering about it and still were unable to succeed; it seems like there's something wrong somewhere."

Xiao Longnu said, "Originally, I didn't understand it but last night when the Taoist nun took her precious sword out, it allowed me to remember something."

Yang Guo recalled the stance that Sun Bu'Er used last night and immediately understood, he called out, "Ah yes, yes, it requires the kung fu of the Ancient Tomb to be used simultaneously with the kung fu of Quanzhen, no wonder we've been going wrong."

When Lin Chaoying developed the "Jade Heart Manual" alone in the ancient tomb, she wanted to defeat the techniques of the Quanzhen sect; but her love for Wang Chongyang still had not been extinguished. When she devised the final stage, she imagined that one day she would be fighting shoulder to shoulder with her lover. Because of this, the stage requires one person to use the techniques of the "Jade Heart Manual", the other Quanzhen martial arts, mutually aiding each other and attacking together. That day, Lin Chaoying was filled with thoughts of love and affection, she was wrapped up in them; all those feelings were placed into this stage.

The pair of swords being horizontal and vertical is not the main aim; the most important aspect lies in fighting the enemy together hand in hand. But it wasn't appropriate to

mark this matter of the heart down clearly on the rooms ceiling. When Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo first practiced, their love had yet to blossom; they had no way to understand what their Ancestor Grandma sought. When they studied, both of them practiced the formulae of their own sect so of course they could not grasp the intricacies within.

Both of them now understood; they went and broke off a willow branch each, and began to study the stances. Xiao Longnu slowly used the "Jade Maiden Sword", Yang Guo used the sword techniques of Quanzhen. After many stances, they felt that it was difficult to use them together harmoniously. The two of them did not envisage that when Lin Chaoying developed this particular swordplay, she was imagining herself fighting shoulder to shoulder with Wang Chongyang against an enemy. Every stance and move was designed to mutually protect the other. Right now, when Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo were studying it, they were treating each other as the enemy, thrusting and attacking each other. Killing the opposition was not what was intended. In reality, Lin Chaoying and Wang Chongyang were the first class fighters of the world at that time; there wasn't anyone that was a match for just one of them. This particular set of unity kung fu didn't have much use; it was just the unrestrained imagination of Lin Chaoying, showing her heart's feelings. When she developed this swordplay her martial arts had already reached their pinnacle; the stances, postures and power were pressing, tight and continuous, not allowing a hair to be out of place. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu did not understand the workings within and so, of course, it would be difficult for them to achieve this final level.

The two practiced for a while but still felt that something was wrong.

Xiao Longnu said, "It could be that we've remembered it wrong, let's go back to the tomb and clarify things and then practice it again."

Yang Guo was about to reply when suddenly the sounds of horse hoofs could be heard, and then a horse galloped past. The horse had red hair, the person on it was wearing purple, and they galloped past like the wind; it was Huang Rong who was riding on the little red horse.

Yang Guo didn't want to be troubled by the Guo family so he discussed with Xiao Longnu about changing paths and followed a small path instead so they won't bump into them again. Xiao Longnu was the Master; but aside from martial arts, she didn't understand anything else, she had no opinions. That night the two lodged in a small inn. Yang Guo slept on the bed, Xiao Longnu hung a rope across the room and slept on the rope. The two had decided to marry each other, but naturally they still followed the sleeping arrangements that they'd had in the tomb for years. After meeting again and practicing martial arts as they used to, when they thought about their loved one being by their side, both felt limitless delight.

By midday the next day, the two arrived at a large town. People were everywhere, horses came, carts went; it was a great atmosphere. Yang Guo took Xiao Longnu to a restaurant for something to eat; as soon as they went upstairs he was surprised as he saw Huang Rong and Wu brothers at a table eating.

Yang Guo thought that since they've met, it wasn't inappropriate for him to pretend that he didn't see them so he greeted them and called out, "Auntie Guo."

Huang Rong frowned, her face looked anxious and worried, she asked, "Have you seen my daughter?"

Yang Guo said, "No. Isn't sister Fu with you?"

Before Huang Rong could reply, the stairs rattled, and a group of people came up. The first person was tall and slender; it was Jinlun Fawang. Yang Guo quickly turned around and didn't carry on speaking with Huang Rong, he quietly went over to Xiao Longnu and whispered, "Turn your back, don't look at them."

But Jinlun Fawang's eyes were very sharp, all the people upstairs entered his eyes, he gave a chuckle and sat down at a table. Yang Guo was about to turn his head around when suddenly Huang Rong called out, "Fu'er!" He couldn't stop himself from turning his head, and saw Guo Fu sitting at the same table as Jinlun Fawang. Her eyes were staring at her mother but she didn't dare go over.

After Jinlun Fawang failed in his plan at the Lu Manor, he was angry and couldn't accept what had happened. He was trying to formulate a plan to turn defeat into victory; also Huo Dou had fallen victim to the Jade Bee needles. The poison was showing its effects; he tried many methods to cure this poison but none of them were effective. He had to find a way to get the antidote and so they didn't go far and stayed in the area around the Lu Manor. It was Guo Fu who happened to meet danger; in the early morning she took the red horse out for a ride, meeting this great enemy at this time. He took her off the horse in one swipe. The little red horse was quick witted; it dashed back to the manor and hissed out in distress incessantly. Guo Jing and the others knew that Guo Fu had met with danger; they were alarmed and immediately went out to look for her separately.

Though Huang Rong was pregnant, she still went and took the Wu brothers along to search for her. They saw Yang Guo and his Master. They didn't guess that it was Jinlun Fawang

who was detaining Guo Fu; and then they too arrived at this particular restaurant.

When Huang Rong saw her daughter, she was happy but alarmed at seeing her in the hands of the enemy. After giving one call, she didn't say another word. Holding a pair of chopsticks in her hand and waving them about on the table, and trying to come up with a plan to save her daughter. Just as she was pondering, Jinlun Fawang suddenly said, "Chief Huang, is this your lovely daughter? Yesterday I saw her in your arms, relaxing; it was really charming."

Huang Rong gave a 'heng' sound, not replying.

Wu Xiuwen stood up and shouted, "And you're supposed to be a leader of martial artists! You lost in the duel so you went to bully someone's young daughter, aren't you ashamed?"

Jinlun Fawang ignored his words and continued, "Chief Huang, when we dueled yesterday, we were clearly the winner yet you people made up a lot of excuses and complications; that is not the action of good men. First give me the antidote and then we'll set a date for a duel; we'll compete fairly and properly for the place of the Chancellor of Wulin."

Huang Rong gave another 'heng' sound, not saying a word.

Wu Xiuwen said loudly, "First release Miss Guo; we'll deliver the antidote immediately and there'll still be time to discuss the matter of dueling again later on."

Huang Rong glanced over at Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu thinking, "The antidote is on them, yet you hastily promised them the antidote without knowing whether or not they'll give it to us."

Jinlun Fawang said, "Could it be that only you know how to use poisonous projectiles? You people used a poisonous needle to injure my disciple. I can also prick your daughter with a few poisonous needles. If you give me the antidote, then I'll cure her here. When it comes to releasing her, I'm afraid it won't be easy."

Huang Rong saw that her daughter looked normal, it looks like she wasn't hurt, but the love between a mother and daughter is deep, she didn't know what to do. There's a saying; 'worry then panic'; though she was matchless in terms of coming up with ideas and plans, right now, she was at her wit's end.

She saw the waiter bringing dishes and wine to Jinlun Fawang's table. Jinlun Fawang and the others ate heartily, talking and laughing. Guo Fu sat there frozen, just staring at her mother, not picking up her chopsticks. Huang Rong felt as if her heart was being cut open; she disturbed her internal chi and air and suddenly her lower abdomen ached.

After Jinlun Fawang finished eating and drinking, he stood up and said, "Chief Huang, follow us."

Huang Rong was startled and understood, not only is he going to take her daughter but he wanted to take her away as well. Right now everything was in place; she only had the Wu brothers at her side and they were not his match; she couldn't stop her face from completely changing.

Jinlun Fawang continued, "Chief Huang, there's no need for you to be frightened, you are an eminent person of Wulin, we will treat you with respect. Once a decision has been made about the position of Chancellor of Wulin, we will immediately return you to the south."

When he saw Huang Rong upstairs, he knew he had a great opportunity; all he had to do was capture her and the martial artists of the central plains would have no choice but to submit. This was a hundred times better than capturing Guo Fu; this really was the deal of a lifetime that had landed on his lap. Huang Rong was worrying about her daughter and didn't think about this possible situation.

The Wu brothers saw that their Master's wife was distressed; they knew they weren't a match but they couldn't just sit there doing nothing. A pair of long swords was drawn out to protect their Master's wife.

Huang Rong whispered, "Quickly jump out of the window, then go and find your Master for help."

The Wu brothers glanced at her and glanced at Guo Fu, then hurried to the window.

Huang Rong secretly cursed, "Idiot, how could you allow such a delay?"

Indeed, just a little delay and it was too late. Jinlun Fawang's long arms came sweeping out, each arm grabbing the back of a brother, like an eagle catching two little chicks. The Wu brothers urgently thrust their swords back but Jinlun Fawang didn't move out of the way; his arms swung a little, Wu Dunru's sword was now heading towards his little brother, Wu Xiuwen's sword was heading towards his big brother. They were startled; they quickly stopped the thrusts and flung their swords away. A 'dang lang' sound was heard as the swords landed on the floor with the Wu brothers avoiding injury.

Jinlun Fawang's arms shook as he flung the two over ten feet away and said, "Just be obedient and follow me." He turned his head towards Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu and said, "If you aren't with Chief Huang then leave at your

convenience, but don't hinder my plans again. Your kung fu is excellent; take care and practice for another ten or twenty years, by then, you won't have a match under heaven."

He wasn't actually praising them; he knew that although Huang Rong, Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu's martial arts could not compare to his, if they fought together it would be difficult to handle them. Although he'll win, he may not be able to capture Huang Rong. Because of this he deliberately tried to divide them, concentrating on the trunk and ignoring the branches.

He didn't know that Huang Rong was pregnant and inconvenienced; he calculated that her extremely ingenious "Dog Beating Stick Technique" would make her a strong opponent.

Xiao Longnu said, "Guo'er, let's leave! That old monk is really powerful, we can't beat him." All that she hoped for was to return to the ancient tomb and spend the rest of her life with Yang Guo. She did not care about the world's blood affairs. When she saw Jinlun Fawang she was afraid and so immediately said what she was feeling. Yang Guo agreed; he stood up and went to the top of the stairs, thinking that, now that they're returning to the ancient tomb, most probably he won't ever see Huang Rong again. He couldn't stop himself from turning his head around and giving her another glance.

He saw her face looked bleak, her left arm holding her lower abdomen, showing that she was secretly in pain. Yang Guo thought, "Uncle and Auntie Guo were rather meddling in not allowing me and Gu Gu to be together, but they did not have any ill intentions. Today Auntie Guo's in trouble, how can I just leave like this? But the enemy is too strong; me and Gu Gu fighting together won't be a match for that Tibetan monk. I can't save Auntie Guo, so

why should I throw away mine and Gu Gu's lives? It would be better for me to go and tell Uncle Guo and let him lead the rescue."

Yang Guo took Xiao Longnu's hand and moved his foot to walk down the stairs when he saw a Mongolian warrior going over to Huang Rong, coarsely saying, "Come quickly! Why are you delaying?" He stretched out his arm and grabbed her upper arm, treating her as a prisoner.

Huang Rong had been the Beggar Clan's Chief for over ten years, her position and status was respected by all in Wulin. Although she is in a distressing situation today, how could she allow herself to be disgraced by this ruffian? She saw a pair of hairy hands reaching out towards her and immediately swept her sleeve. The sleeve covered his wrist as she flung out and a 'hu' sound was heard as the fat body of the Mongolian warrior flew out of the window, landing in the street, barely alive. Huang Rong didn't want her hand to touch his wrist so she first covered his arm with her sleeve and then separated the sleeve throwing him away.

At first when they spoke politely, the people in the restaurant didn't take much notice of them; when they suddenly saw a fight had broken out, the restaurant was in chaos.

Jinlun Fawang chuckled and said, "Indeed Chief Huang has great kung fu." He copied the actions of the Mongolian warrior, stepping up to her and stretching out his hand to grab her arm. Huang Rong knew that he wanted to show off his martial arts; though he was using the same method, she could never do the same thing to him, she could only take a step back.

Yang Guo had taken a few steps down the stairs when he saw a struggle suddenly arising with Huang Rong about to

suffer an insult; it stirred his heroic nature, he didn't care about the dangers to himself, he flew over and picked up the sword that Wu Dunru dropped. He used a stance of "The Green Dragon Exits the Sea", urgently thrusting towards Jinlun Fawang's back. He shouted, "Chief Huang is carrying a child and you're taking this opportunity to make your move, aren't you ashamed?"

Jinlun Fawang heard the noise of a blade cutting through air behind him, he didn't turn around and turned his finger towards the dull side of the blade, striking it. A 'dang' sound was heard; Yang Guo's arm trembled with numbness as the sword tip went downwards. Yang Guo quickly flew out of the way.

Jinlun Fawang turned around and said, "Young man, leave quickly! You're young yet your martial arts are not weak, in the future you will be able to far exceed me. But you are not a match for me now, why come forward to die by my hands?"

Those sentences both praised and warned Yang Guo. Jinlun Fawang hated the two of them for knocking his golden wheel out of the air and interfering with this plans to take the position of the Chancellor of Wulin. Right now, he weighed up what was more important; capturing Huang Rong was the number one objective, he didn't want to be distracted by other people. He hoped that Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu would leave this dispute and there'll still be time for him to vent his anger on the two juniors later on. He calls himself a Hero of Tibet; not only are his martial arts frightening, his scheming ability was rather good.

Those words were neither haughty nor humble, yet were not deceiving either. Yang Guo was young and when he heard that in the future his martial arts would be much better than Jinlun Fawang, he was secretly pleased. He

laughed and said, "There's no need to be polite big monk, it's not easy to reach a level as high as yours. Chief Huang raised me, so don't give her any trouble. If she didn't have an illness, your martial arts might not be able to defeat hers. If you don't believe it, why don't you wait until she recovers and then have a duel with her?"

He knew that Jinlun Fawang thought very highly of his martial arts; goading him like this might actually change his mind and he'd let Huang Rong go. How would he know that Jinlun Fawang was worried about Huang Rong, Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu joining together to fight him. That was why he was polite towards Yang Guo. When he heard these words he glanced at Huang Rong's face; indeed her face did look distressed, her illness was not light. He thought, "Why should he be worried about the threat of Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu?" He then gave a chuckle and went over to the stairs, he said, "You stay as well!"

Xiao Longnu stood on the stairs with Jinlun Fawang between her and Yang Guo; she didn't like this and said, "Get out of the way monk, let him come down."

Jinlun Fawang frowned, he sent a stance of "Opening the Tablet with a Single Palm", his natural strength was already high, and attacking from above made this force even stronger. How could Xiao Longnu dare receive this stance head on? She was waiting for Yang Guo at the top of the stairs, she didn't leap backwards; her legs lightly lifted, she used her amazing lightness kung fu to pass the opponent's body to reach Yang Guo, standing shoulder to shoulder next to him.

When she was passing Jinlun Fawang's side, he stuck out his elbow but it missed; he was in awe of the swiftness and agility of her movements. Yang Guo picked up Wu Xiuwen's

sword and passed it into her hand, he said, “Gu Gu, that monk is so rude, let’s give him a beating.”

A ‘qiang lang’ sound was heard as Jinlun Fawang took out a wheel from his gown; this wheel was the same size as his golden wheel but was dark green and was made out of iron. This wheel also had the Tibetan scriptures marked on it. He has a total of five wheels; golden, silver, bronze, iron and lead; when he met a strong enemy he really could send out all five wheels at once, but he had always used the golden wheel only. With it he had defeated countless strong enemies and because of this he received the nickname of ‘Jinlun Fawang’ (King of the Golden Wheel or Golden Wheel Monk). He had never used the other four wheels before so really, according to martial arts level he has reached, it should be ‘Wu Lun Fawang’ (King of the Five Wheels or The Five Wheeled Monk). In the Lu Manor, his golden wheel was taken out of the air by Yang Guo using the golden rod; now he took out his iron wheel and said, “Chief Huang, are you joining them as well?”

Though he saw that Huang Rong’s looked ill, he was still worried about her martial arts, he called her ‘Chief Huang’ to remind her of her status as the chief of a clan, joining up with others to fight one person would lower her.

Yang Guo called out, “Chief Huang is going home now; she hasn’t any time for you.” He turned around to Huang Rong and said, “Auntie Guo, take sister Fu and go.” He had made his decision; though he and Xiao Longnu would not be able to beat the enemy, they could force themselves to last a while. If it came to escaping, they would probably still be able to get away; luckily they weren’t fighting for victory but trying to escape from the devil’s grasp. So what if they had to run away pathetically?

He raised his sword and thrust towards Jinlun Fawang. Xiao Longnu saw that he was using the techniques of the “Jade Heart Manual” so she followed and attacked from the side; she hadn’t given any thought to it, when she saw Yang Guo attacking the monk, she too started to fight him to aid Yang Guo.

Jinlun Fawang used his wheel to block the two swords, but he didn’t like how cluttered the restaurant was, it hindered his movements. On one occasion he was fighting using his wheel, on another he kicked away the chairs and tables.

Yang Guo was thinking, “If we meet you head on, we’ll definitely lose; only by obstructing you will we last a little longer.” He saw that Jinlun Fawang was kicking away the tables and chairs, he did the opposite and pushed the tables and chairs in between them. His and Xiao Longnu’s lightness kung fu was superb, they darted around, not fighting the enemy properly; they would suddenly throw a jug of wine over, suddenly tip the dishes over causing the restaurant to be covered in wine and juices from the dishes.

Huang Rong took this opportunity to snatch Guo Fu back. After Da’erba fell under Yang Guo’s “Soul Altering Spell” he was out of it; sometimes he would be awake, sometimes in a daze. Huo Dou was seriously injured with the poison and the rest of the Mongolian warriors weren’t very skillful; how could they fend off Huang Rong?

Yang Guo called out, “Auntie Guo, leave quickly!”

But Huang Rong saw that the stances of Jinlun Fawang were lethal; even if Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu used all their strength it would be difficult for them to defend against the attacks. As of now they were able to fend him off by fighting like this, but once Jinlun Fawang finds a weakness and then makes his lethal move, how could their

lives remain intact? Huang Rong thought, "He's risking his life for me, how can I look out for myself only and leave?" She stood at the entrance of the stairs, quietly watching the battle.

But the Wu brothers kept on urging Huang Rong, "Master wife, let's go, you're not feeling well, you need to take care."

At first Huang Rong ignored them but when they kept on pressing her she said angrily, "What use is it to learn martial arts if you don't behave with 'heroic' values? What use have you got living in this world? The one named Yang is a hundred times better than you. Huh, you brothers better think well about this."

The brothers felt embarrassed, their good intentions dismissed just like that by their Master's wife.

Guo Fu picked up the broken leg of a table off the floor and called out, "Brother Wu's, let's all fight him."

Huang Rong held her back and said, "Going up there with your lowly kung fu, do you want to die?"

Guo Fu pouted, not believing her mother. She saw that the stances that Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu weren't anything special, sometimes their form looked Masterly but the sword stances weren't at all lethal.

Every time Jinlun Fawang went to attack, the chairs and tables would impede him while Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu moved around vibrantly, flying here and suddenly darting there, fighting as they floated around.

He had a thought, he suddenly used the force in his legs, non-stop sounds of 'ka la ka la' were heard as the overturned tables and chairs were crushed and broken. He

used the iron wheel in his hands to attack while his legs used the “Thousand Kilogram Fall”; the chairs and tables all broke wherever his legs were. After a while, the upstairs of the restaurant became covered by a layer of broken wood. The three of them battled on the debris without any obstructions.

Jinlun Fawang moved around in large steps, the iron wheel flashing around, ‘lang lang’ sounds were heard, his arms in motion as he attacked the two ferociously. There were now fewer tables and chairs in the way, so Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu had to use real martial arts to defend against him. Jinlun Fawang did not give an inch, on the fourth stance he smashed forward fiercely, a ferocious gust of wind rushed forward before the iron wheel even arrived.

Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo both thrust forwards, the sword tips striking the wheel, they were able to block this wheel with their combined strength but the swords were bent by the force.

The two used all their strength to repel the wheel, Yang Guo then thrust forward attacking the enemy’s upper body, Xiao Longnu cut urgently across the enemy’s left leg. Jinlun Fawang kicked out towards Xiao Longnu’s wrist, the iron wheel swerved and attacked Yang Guo’s neck. Yang Guo ducked and crouched to avoid the iron wheel. At that time, Jinlun Fawang suddenly let go with his right hand, the iron wheel dropped downwards towards Yang Guo’s head, at the same time Jinlun Fawang tried to grab Xiao Longnu’s shoulders with his free hand.

In just a flash of an eye, the two had fallen into great danger. Huang Rong gave an ‘ah’ cry and was about to go forward to save them when she saw Yang Guo swerve and fly just above the floor, before he touched down, the sword went towards Jinlun Fawang’s back. That stance achieved

two aims at once, attacking and defending at the same time, solving the crisis he was in. He used the idea of 'surrounding Wei to save Zhao', and stopped Jinlun Fawang from attacking Xiao Longnu. This stance was called "The Wild Goose Attacks from the Side", a technique from Quanzhen swordplay.

Jinlun Fawang gave a 'yi' call, before the iron wheel fell on the floor, the back of his right leg knocked against the wheel sending the wheel flying up with 'lang lang' noises, smashing towards Yang Guo's head. In the midst of danger, Yang Guo had used a stance of Quanzhen swordplay which was surprisingly effective, so he used another Quanzhen stance, "The White Rainbow Traveling Across the Sky", the flat side of the sword struck the wheel.

The sword was light, the wheel heavy, that attack originally had no chance, but the strike was just at the right place, fulfilling the martial art theory of 'Four Liang Moving a Thousand Jin', and the iron wheel changed directions, flying towards Jinlun Fawang's head. Guo Fu clapped her hands as she watched with delight.

Jinlun Fawang dared to release his weapon because he thought that his enemies had no way to receive the wheel; if the opponent used their weapon to strike out against the wheel, even if it was a heavy whip or saber, once it meets the wheel the weapon will be knocked from the opponent's hand. He could not have predicted that Yang Guo had the ability to redirect the wheel! Jinlun Fawang was furious, he caught the wheel and secretly used his spin technique and sent the wheel flying out again. This time his internal energy was more pressing, the wheel made no sounds because the iron wheel was spinning too fast and the spheres in the wheel could not collide with each other. When Yang Guo struck the wheel for the first time, he used the techniques of the "Nine Yin Manual" unwittingly, this

time when he stretched out his sword to strike the wheel; a 'dang' noise was heard as the sword shook out of his hands. Jinlun Fawang immediately used "The Falling Obelisk Hand", heavily smashing towards him. Yang Guo wasn't completely familiar with the techniques of the "Nine Yin Manual"; this time the force he put behind his strike was incorrect.

When Xiao Longnu saw Yang Guo was in danger, she twisted her trim waist and urgently thrust her sword forward. The force of this stance had an assured lethality, the appearance attractive and extremely graceful; she was actually using the martial arts of the final stage of the "Jade Heart Manual".

Huang Rong and her daughter watched with joy and both called out; "Wonderful!"

Jinlun Fawang took back his palm and leapt away, he used his wheel to fend off the sword. Yang Guo took this opportunity to recover his sword. Yang Guo really had escaped from the death's clutches just now, but when one is at death's door they are especially alert. He suddenly had a thought, "When Gu Gu and I both use the "Jade Maiden Swordplay", it was difficult for us to defend against him. But when I used the "Quanzhen Swordplay" and Gu Gu the "Jade Maiden Swordplay" we actually managed to turn danger into safety. Could it be that the final stage of the "Jade Heart Manual" is used this way?"

He immediately called out, "Gu Gu, "The Traces of Waves at Heaven's Cliffs"!" As he said this he slanted his sword and thrust forward.

Xiao Longnu didn't give it much thought and followed his instructions and used the "The Traces of Waves at Heaven's Cliffs" as stated in the manual, she waved her sword and

chopped forward. The names of the stances are the same but they had a difference, one of them was a lethal sword stance from the "Quanzhen Swordplay", the other a dangerous stance from the "Jade Maiden Swordplay". When the two were used in unison, the power of it immediately increased to a frightening level.

Jinlun Fawang had no way to block both of the swords so he quickly moved back; two 'chi' sounds were heard as the swords thrust at his body. Luckily, he dodged appropriately, the two sword tips brushed past him and just made some holes in his clothes. He broke out in a cold sweat from the shock.

Jinlun Fawang urgently moved back another two steps to avoid the tip of the swords. He then heard Yang Guo call out, "'Flowers under the Moon'!" The attack came downwards, like an icy wheel hanging in the air; a light glimmering crossed the floor. Xiao Longnu's sword quivered, like a flower fluttering in the wind, cutting across to and fro, dazzling Jinlun Fawang's eyes, he didn't know where the attacks were coming from, he could only leap back to avoid it.

Yang Guo called out, "'Drinking Wine Purely'!" The sword handle was raised, the sword tip aimed downwards, like raising a wine jug and pouring the wine. Xiao Longnu's sword was the opposite, the tip aiming upwards towards her cherry lips, like raising a cup of wine and drinking it.

Jinlun Fawang saw that the sword stances of the two were becoming stranger and stranger, but they were matching each other; all the weaknesses of one were covered by the strengths of the other, and the lethal aspects of the stances were increasing without end. He was becoming more and more frightened, thinking, "The world is a large place, indeed there are many able people; how could I ever dream

of such unimaginable swordplay in Tibet? Ai! I'm just a frog at the bottom of the well; I have seen little of the world's heroes." He was disheartened and looked even more like a defeated man.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu had studied this final level of swordplay many times without reward, now they were in extreme danger, the two of them concerned for each other. Both put the other's life above theirs as they rescued their lover first, fulfilling the main aim of this swordplay. Every stance of this swordplay displays actions done by two, perhaps "Stroking the Zither and Playing the Flute", or maybe "Sweeping Snow and Preparing Tea", or perhaps "Playing Chess under the Pine" or "Exchange of the Cranes by the Pond", all of them show a male and female together. The gracefulness and exquisiteness of the stances really was indescribable.

Lin Chaoying, lost in the game of love, spent the rest of her life in the tomb. She was versed in all the martial arts and literature, music and other arts; in the end she incorporated all the things she had learned in her life into this set of martial arts. When she was developing this set of martial arts, she was trying to comfort herself; how would she know that tens of years later, a pair of lovers would use this set of martial arts to fight off a strong enemy. This was something that she could never have predicted.

At first Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu did not completely understand the swordplay's ingenuity but eventually as they kept on using it, their proficiency in the swordplay kept on getting better. If the male and female who used this set of sword plays weren't lovers, there would be many aspects of the swordplay they would not be able to comprehend. The two would not have a feeling of being linked with each other. If it were friends who were teaming up they would be too polite, if it were a senior and junior it

wouldn't be suitable to rely on each other. However, if it were a husband and wife, they would be able to use some of the Masterly aspects of this swordplay, but without the feelings of being drowned in love, the shyness, the feeling of being close yet far, the pain of gains and losses, they would be a level lower. Now Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were deeply in love but they had yet to marry, their hearts were concerned about the hardships of the future, they were joyous and sad, sweet and bitter, this feeling of gradually being linked with each other was what Lin Chaoying had intended to create when she developed the "Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden Sword".

Huang Rong watched from the side and she saw Xiao Longnu's cheeks going red, looking shy; Yang Guo would glance over at her all the time, returning her affection. Though they were fighting a strong enemy, they displayed their delights and joys, and the appearance of being deeply in love. Huang Rong couldn't stop from being startled, but at the same time she was infected by the two and she began to remember feelings and events when she fell in love with Guo Jing.

The restaurant was filled with the noise of a life and death battle, but in the midst of this, unexpectedly, there were the boundless feelings of love showing.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were now in tune with each other, it was even harder for Jinlun Fawang to defend. He regretted the fact that he had smashed up the chairs and tables earlier on, otherwise, with the table and chairs as obstructions, the enemies' attacks would not be as lethal and swift. He saw that if he continued, he would definitely lose his life. He retreated down the stairs, step by step. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu attacked from above and they saw that they were about to drive him away.

Huang Rong called out, "Rid the evil completely, Guo'er, don't let him go."

She saw that the reason why Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu could beat Jinlun Fawang was because of this ingenious swordplay. It was somewhat fortunate that they had come up with this. If they spared Jinlun Fawang today and let a person with such abilities in martial arts go back and study for a way to defeat this swordplay, when the need to take his life arises again in the future, the task would be extremely difficult.

Yang Guo agreed and launched a fatal attack, "Cultivating the Chrysanthemum in the Little Garden", "Speaking at Night at the Western Window", "The Couplet in the Willow's Shade", "Bamboo Falling into the Pond", when these stances came out, Jinlun Fawang nearly wasn't able to evade these attacks let alone trying to counterattack.

Yang Guo had originally listened to Huang Rong's instructions to take his life, but what he didn't know was that when Lin Chaoying developed this particular swordplay, she was doing this to comfort herself, there was no intention to wound or kill the enemy especially with a heart filled with love. Though this swordplay was powerful, it did not aim to take the opponent's life. Though Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu managed to force Jinlun Fawang to scramble around in a pathetic manner, taking his life was not an easy task.

Jinlun Fawang did not know about the background of this swordplay, he just saw that the opponent's extraordinary stances folded in on each other, he knew that the enemy had yet to unleash their most powerful move. If the two attack, his old life would be lost. In this danger, a plan came into his mind; he used strength in his legs and snapped a stair step. He knew that with the obstruction of the hole in

the stairs between him and the two, they would have no way to advance. By the time that a third step was snapped, the long swords could not reach his body.

Jinlun Fawang raised his iron wheel and said, "Today, I have seen the martial arts of the central plains, I am completely in awe. What is the name of your swordplay?"

Yang Guo said seriously, "The martial arts of the central plains are led by the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" and the "Donkey Piercing Sword", our swordplay is the "Donkey Piercing Sword"."

Jinlun Fawang was startled and said, "'Donkey Piercing Sword'?"

Yang Guo said, "Yep, a swordplay that pierces bald donkeys."

Jinlun Fawang then knew that Yang Guo was insulting him, he was furious and shouted, "Rude punk, you'll get to know the power of Jinlun Fawang." The iron wheel rang out with 'lang lang' noises as he left taking large steps.

All they saw was his body floating away quickly like a flash, disappearing in the shadows by the corner. Yang Guo knew it would be difficult to catch up; he turned around and saw Da'erba stand up holding up Huo Dou, his face pale. He said, "Senior apprentice brother, are you going to kill me?"

Yang Guo saw that the two looked pitiful; he said to Huang Rong, "Auntie Guo, should we let them go?" Huang Rong nodded. Yang Guo saw that Huo Dou looked like he was in unbearable distress; he took out a bottle of Jade Bee honey from his pockets and pointed to Huo Dou. He took medicine to Da'erba and gave the jar to him. Da'erba was delighted and he chatted with Huo Dou for a while.

Huo Dou took out a packet of medicine and gave it to Yang Guo, he said, "The Senior who used the pen fell under my poison nails; this is the antidote."

Da'erba saluted Yang Guo and said, "Thank you Senior apprentice brother."

Yang Guo copied his actions and smiled as he imitated his Tibetan, "Thank you senior apprentice brother."

Da'erba was surprised, "Why did Senior apprentice brother call me Senior apprentice brother?" A thought went through his mind and then he understood, "He's reincarnated as another person and is allowing me to be the senior apprentice brother; he doesn't want to fight for this position with me." He was even more touched and bowed deeply, he stretched out his arms and picked up Huo Dou and then left with the rest of the Mongolian warriors.

Yang Guo gave the antidote to Huang Rong and made a salute, he said, "Auntie Guo, nephew will leave now. Auntie and Uncle Guo take care." He felt sad as he thought about how this would be the last time he would see her.

Huang Rong asked, "Where are you going?"

Yang Guo said, "Gu Gu and I are going to live in seclusion in a place where there will be no people, never leaving again to avoid bringing shame to your and Uncle Guo's name."

Huang Rong thought, "Today he has risked his life saving me and Fu'er, this is not a small deed; now I'm watching him going down this dark path, how can I not save him?" So she said, "There's no need to rush, we're all tired; we'll rest some rooms and rest for the night, we could part tomorrow." Yang Guo saw that she was earnest and sincere, it would be inappropriate to reject her offer so he agreed.

Huang Rong took out some money and gave it to the restaurant owner for the damages done, and then they went to an inn to rest. That night after supper, Huang Rong got rid of Guo Fu by telling her to go and talk with the Wu brothers; she called Xiao Longnu into her room and said, "Sister, I have something to give to you."

Xiao Longnu said, "What?"

Huang Rong pulled her in front of herself and took out a comb and brushed her hair, seeing her black silk hair hanging down across her shoulders, soft and shiny, extremely cute. She carefully rolled up her hair and removed a golden hair clasp from her own head and said, "Sister, I'm giving you this to wear."

The gold hair clasp was exquisitely produced; the body of it resembled the stem of a rose, the stem and flower looped around; the place where it connected formed an unfolding rose. Huang Yaoshi collected countless treasures, out of them she had picked out this golden hair clasp of masterly artisanship.

Xiao Longnu had never worn any type of jewelry, to tie her hair she used a pine hairpin; though she saw the hair clasp was striking, she did not think anything of it, she just thanked her casually. Huang Rong fitted the hair clasp on her hair and then immediately chatted with her in a leisurely manner.

After talking to her for a while, she found that Xiao Longnu was very innocent and naïve, she didn't know a thing about the ways of the world. Under the candlelight she saw her elegant and beautiful face, an extraordinary beauty; if she and Yang Guo weren't Master and disciple, the two really were a great match. She asked, "Sister, you really love Guo'er, don't you?"

Xiao Longnu beamed and said, "Yes, why won't you people allow him to be with me?"

Huang Rong was startled, she remembered the times when she was young, her father wouldn't allow her to marry Guo Jing, the Jiang Nan Seven Freaks called her a 'little witch', only after many trials and tribulations did she and Guo Jing finally marry. She saw that Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu really loved each other; could she make herself stop them?

But the fact is that they are a Master and disciple, if they become lovers it would be greatly unethical, what face would they have left with the heroes of the world? She gave a sigh and said, "Sister, there are many things that you don't understand about the world. If you and Guo'er become husband and wife, others will look down on you for a generation."

Xiao Longnu gave a slight smile and said, "What's so important about others looking down on me?"

Huang Rong was startled again, she felt that her words had the same attitude as that of she and her father, a real feeling of 'I do whatever I want'; not caring about the views of the world. When she thought about this, she nodded, such a character would not confine herself to the views of the world, but she then thought about the deep love and affection of her husband for Yang Guo. It wouldn't matter whether Yang Guo was going to become her son in law or not, she just hoped that his character and morals would be perfect, so she said, "What about Guo'er? Others will look down on him as well."

Xiao Longnu said, "He and I will live in a place where no one can see us for rest of our lives, happy for ever, why should we care about others?"

Huang Rong asked, "What place where no one can see you?"

Xiao Longnu said, "It is a large ancient tomb, I have always lived there."

Huang Rong was stunned and said, "Could it be that you would live in there forever and never come out?"

Xiao Longnu was very happy, she stood up and paced back and forth across the room and then said, "Yes, why go outside? The people outside are so bad."

Huang Rong said, "Guo'er has always roamed about since he was young, won't he be bored staying in an ancient tomb forever?"

Xiao Longnu smiled and said, "With me by his side, why would he get bored?"

Huang Rong sighed and said, "At first of course he won't be bored. But after a few years he would start to remember the beautiful outside world, if he can't come out when he gets older, he would be greatly troubled."

Xiao Longnu was originally very happy and delighted; when she heard these words her heart sank and said, "I'm going to ask Guo'er, I don't want to speak with you anymore." She left the room.

Huang Rong saw that her beautiful face suddenly showed signs of being disturbed, her words just now had really hurt the heart of this innocent and naïve girl. She immediately felt rather regretful but she had another thought, she had seen many things but this pair of young lovers were deeply in love, even if these words aren't nice to the ear, it's the heart that matters. She thought, "What would Guo'er say?"

So she quietly went over to Yang Guo's window to listen to their conversation.

She heard Xiao Longnu ask, "Guo'er, would you be troubled if you spent the rest of your life with me? Would you get tired of it?"

Yang Guo said, "Why are you asking me again? You know that there isn't anything more I want in this world. We'll be together until we're old, our hair white and our teeth falling out, we would still love each other as we do now, not ever parting." His words were said earnestly and with real sincerity.

When Xiao Longnu heard this, her heart was moved, she couldn't stop herself from being overwhelmed, after a while she said, "Yes, my feelings are the same." She took out a rope from her bag and hung it across the room, she said, "Go to bed!"

Yang Guo said, "Auntie Guo said, tonight you should go and sleep in the same room as she and her daughter, I with the Wu brothers in another room."

Xiao Longnu said, "No! Why does she want two boys to be with you? I want to be with you and sleep with you." She waved her hand out and extinguished the oil lamp.

When Huang Rong heard these words outside, she was extremely startled, "Those two really are doing such things! Then the words of that old Taoist Zhao Zhijing weren't a lie!"

When she thought about the two of them sleeping together on the same bed, she felt that it would be inappropriate to eavesdrop on them and was about to leave when she suddenly saw a white flash going across the room. Someone was lying in midair, after moving for a bit, they stopped.

Huang Rong was surprised and used the moonlight in the room to see what was going on. She saw Xiao Longnu lying on a rope in midair while Yang Guo slept on the bed. Though the two slept in the same room, they kept their respect. Huang Rong stood in the courtyard, she felt that the actions of these two were greatly different to others, it really was difficult to discuss their rights and wrongs.

She stood there for a while and was about to enter her room to rest when she heard footsteps, Guo Fu and the Wu brothers had returned. Huang Rong said, "Dun'er, Xiu'er, you brothers go and get another room to rest in, don't stay with brother Yang." The Wu brothers agreed.

Guo Fu asked, "Mother, why?"

Huang Rong said, "It's none of your business."

Wu Xiuwen laughed and said, "I know why. Those two are a Master and disciple yet they aren't; that dirty couple is sleeping in the same room."

Huang Rong reprimanded him; "Xiu'er, what dirty things are you saying?"

Wu Dunru said, "Master wife, you are too kind, why should you care about those sorts of people? I won't speak to him."

Guo Fu said, "Those two saved us; that was a great deed."

Wu Xiuwen said, "Huh, I rather die by the hands of Jinlun Fawang than suffer a favour from animals."

Huang Rong didn't look happy, she said, "Stop talking, go and rest."

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu heard all this. Yang Guo had never gotten on with the Wu brothers ever since they were kids; he just snickered and didn't take it to heart.

But Xiao Longnu was carefully thinking, "Why is it that if Guo'er and I are together, he becomes an animal and us a dirty couple?" She couldn't grasp this and in the middle of the night she woke Yang Guo up and asked, "Guo'er, there is one thing that you must answer truthfully. After living with me in the ancient tomb for a few years, would you start to think about the outside world?"

Yang Guo was startled and didn't reply for a while. Xiao Longnu continued to ask, "If you don't go out, would you become troubled? Though your love for me will never change, would you get bored living in the tomb for such a long time?"

Yang Guo felt that it was difficult to answer these questions, as he thought about it, living with Xiao Longnu forever really would be better than living as a god; but in a cold and dark tomb, even if he didn't get tired of the tomb in ten or twenty years, what about in thirty years? What about forty years? Replying casually, "I would never get bored" would be easy but he has always been frank and true towards Xiao Longnu, he had never said half a lie to her. He pondered for a while and said, "Gu Gu, if we get bored and tired of living in the tomb, we'll go out together."

Xiao Longnu gave an 'en' sound, not saying anymore. She thought, "Mrs. Guo's words weren't a lie. In the future he will get bored and will leave the tomb, and then everyone will be looking down on him, how can he live like that? Why do people look down on him if he and I get together? It looks like I'm an ominous person. I love him, I care for him; I would give my life for him. But these feelings will lead him to have an unhappy life; it looks like it would be better for him not to marry me. It must be for that reason that he refused to agree to marry me that night on Mount Zhongnan."

She kept on going over this in her mind for a long while. Yang Guo's breathing slowed; he was in deep sleep. Xiao Longnu leapt down lightly and went to his bedside, she stared at his handsome face, her heart was in a mess, her emotions kept on turning over, she couldn't stop tears from flowing.

Yang Guo woke up the next morning and felt his shoulder and head was wet; he was slightly surprised and saw that Xiao Longnu wasn't in the room. He sat up and saw some words carefully carved on the table with a golden needle.

'Take care, forget about me.'

Yang Guo's mind immediately became a confused; he stood there stunned and was at his wit's end. He saw that the tears on the table had yet to dry, the dampness on his shoulder and head were also caused by her tears. He wasn't thinking straight, he opened the window and leapt out, calling out, "Gu Gu, Gu Gu!"

The waiter of the inn came over to serve him. Yang Guo asked him when the girl in white left and which direction she headed in. The waiter stared at him; he didn't know how to reply. Yang Guo knew that the opportunity to find her was ever diminishing, if he can't find her today; then there may not be a chance to see her ever again. He went to the stables and leapt onto the skinny horse. At this time, Guo Fu came out of her room and asked, "Where are you going?"

Yang Guo heard but didn't reply, he hurried to the main road and galloped north, in a short while he had gone over tens of li. He kept on calling out, "Gu Gu, Gu Gu!" on the way but where was Xiao Longnu?

After a little while, he saw Jinlun Fawang and his followers on horseback heading west. They all felt shocked when they

saw him riding by himself. Jinlun Fawang pulled his reigns and galloped towards him.

Yang Guo had not brought a weapon with him, meeting the enemy like this was extremely dangerous but the only thing on his mind right now was Xiao Longnu, he didn't even consider his own safety. When he saw Jinlun Fawang coming towards him, he actually turned his horse towards him and went forward to meet him, he asked, "Have you seen my Master?"

Jinlun Fawang was surprised that he didn't run away, he was even more startled when he heard him ask this, he casually replied, "No, isn't she with you?"

At first both of them didn't really think too deeply as they asked and replied, but shortly after, both of them thought about how Yang Guo, being by himself, was not a match for Jinlun Fawang. The two of them looked each other in the eye and both knew. Yang Guo kicked his legs as Jinlun Fawang sent out a hand to grab him. But the skinny horse was exceptionally spirited; it galloped like the wind past him. Jinlun Fawang tried to catch up but Yang Guo and the horse had galloped afar, it would be difficult to catch up with him. Jinlun Fawang had a thought and reigned in his horse, "Since he and his Master has separated, what more have I got to be afraid of? If Chief Huang hasn't gotten far... ha-ha...!" He then gathered his men and led them back.

Yang Guo searched for another while and still there was no trace of Xiao Longnu within tens of li. Emotions stirred in his heart, he felt dizzy and shaky and almost fainted on the back of the horse. He thought with sadness and lamented, "Why did Gu Gu leave me again? How have I offended her again? She cried many tears before she left, she's not angry with me." He suddenly thought of something, "Ah, yes, it must be because of what I said about getting tired of the

ancient tomb, she thought that I didn't want to spend the rest of my life with her." His eyes glistened as it became clear as to what he should do, "She's returning to the tomb. I'll just go back and be with her." Yang Guo's tears turned into smiles and he flipped over a few times on the horse's back.

Now, as the horse dashed and galloped, he wasn't thinking straight and didn't clarify which direction he was heading in. Then he settled down, he determined where north was and turned the horse around and headed for Mount Zhongnan. The more he thought about it the more he believed this was most likely as to where she would be. Most of the pain and despair had now disappeared. He opened his mouth and sang a mountain song.

After midday, he arrived at a small roadside eating place. He finished eating some buns but remembered that when he left in a rush, he forgot to bring money with him. When the owner of the shop was off guard, he quickly leapt onto the horse and galloped away. He heard the insults of the owner from faraway, but what could he do to Yang Guo? He couldn't stop himself from laughing inside.

He continued traveling until 'shen pai shi fen' (evening), all he saw in front of him now was a dense, dark and deep forest, shouts and insults could be heard from within the forest. He was slightly alarmed and listened closely; it was the voices of Jinlun Fawang and Guo Fu.

He knew something was wrong and leapt off the horse. He placed the reins on the saddle and hid behind trees. He slowly followed the voices and after about a hundred feet or so, he saw Huang Rong and her daughter with the Wu brothers fending off Jinlun Fawang in a pile of jumbled rocks deep in the forest. He saw bloodstains on the faces and clothes of the Wu brothers, Huang Rong's and Guo Fu's

hair was in a mess, and they looked wretched. It appeared that if it wasn't for the fact that Jinlun Fawang wanted to keep them alive, they would have long ago died by his iron wheel.

Yang Guo watched for a while and thought, "Gu Gu is not here, if I go up and help them I could lose my life for no reason. What should I do? How can I save Auntie Guo? He suddenly saw Jinlun Fawang send his wheel smashing out; Huang Rong had no way to receive this attack and retreated backwards behind the pile of rocks. Jinlun Fawang hovered around the outside of the rocks, he actually couldn't attack her.

Yang Guo was surprised, he took a closer look and saw that Guo Fu and the Wu brothers also relied on the rocks to avoid danger, in the midst of this danger all they had to do was hide behind the rocks. Da'erba and the others circled from afar, they could close in from any direction; at that time, Guo Fu and the others would hide behind another pile of disorderly rocks.

Yang Guo was extremely surprised, those normal looking pile of rocks actually had such an ingenious use; it really was uncanny. It looked like Huang Rong and the others would be safe from danger but there was no way for them to leave the rock formation.

Jinlun Fawang kept on attacking without stop, though he managed to injure the Wu brothers, it wasn't life threatening, and on their side, one of the Mongolians died by Guo Fu's sword. He saw that there was something strange with this pile of rocks formed by Huang Rong; he first had to grasp and see through the theories behind it before he could get to the four.

He had always thought highly of his intelligence, it's not too urgent at the moment since they can't escape his clutches. Once he's seen through this formation he'll break into it and capture them, showing his power. So he waved out his left hand and ordered his men back, he also retreated back ten feet or so, staring at and studying the rock formation. Most formation uses variations of the 'Wu Xing Ba Gua' trigram; Jinlun Fawang was well versed with these types of tactics, he thought that although the formation was strange, it won't be too far off from the theories of the five elements.

He studied it for a long while, when it looked like he saw through an aspect of the formation, he pondered on it further and it then didn't make sense. The left wing was correct but the right wing changed, when he seemingly saw through the front of the formation, it was difficult to understand the back of it. He was taken aback by this, he was startled and in awe. He excelled in everything, a real outstanding person of the world; with this difficult problem in front of him, he wanted to rely on his own intellect to solve it.

Yang Guo watched as Jinlun Fawang stood there without moving, his eyebrows raised; suddenly his eyes glistened and he flashed over, breaking into the formation, grabbing Guo Fu's arm and quickly retreated. Huang Rong and the brothers were extremely shocked with this sudden change of events. They were at their wit's end, if they left the formation to rescue Guo Fu, they would definitely suffer under his hands.

What had happened was that Guo Fu became careless when she saw the enemy frozen like that; she didn't follow her mother's instructions as to where to stand and was out of the formation's protection. When Jinlun Fawang saw this opportunity he immediately went over and captured her; he

then sealed a pressure point on the side of her body and placed her down on the ground. He deliberately kept her mute pressure point unsealed, letting her call out and plead, wanting her to agitate Huang Rong into exiting the formation.

Guo Fu felt her body ache unbearably and she couldn't stop herself from calling out. How could Huang Rong not know what the enemy was planning, but when she heard the calls of her daughter, her heart ached unbearably, she could only bite down on her lips and endure it.

From behind a tree Yang Guo understood what was happening. He saw Huang Rong raising her stick, about to come out from the rock formation and rescue her daughter; this was extremely dangerous, he didn't give it much thought and suddenly leapt out and grabbed Guo Fu from behind, throwing himself forward into the rock formation.

Jinlun Fawang's iron wheel flew out towards Yang Guo's back. Yang Guo was in midair, it would be difficult to dodge this attack; he pushed Guo Fu towards Huang Rong and used the "Thousand Kilogram Fall". His body dropped straight down and fell down solidly onto the pile of rocks, he heard the 'qiang lang lang' sound of the iron wheel brushing past his head, the wheel circled around and came back into Jinlun Fawang's hand.

Huang Rong hugged her daughter lovingly. She saw Yang Guo pick himself up from the rocks, his eyes were green and nose bruised, she quickly stretched out her stick and led him into the formation.

Jinlun Fawang's plan had failed and again it was due to Yang Guo, but instead of being angry he was actually pleased, he gave a chuckle and said, "Fine, coming here now saves me the trouble of finding you later on."

Yang Guo risked his life for this rescue out of righteous indignation; only after entering the formation did he see that by doing this, his life would most probably end soon. He would never have the opportunity to see Xiao Longnu ever again. He couldn't stop himself from feeling regret.

Huang Rong asked, "Where's your Master?"

Yang Guo gloomily said, "She suddenly left in the middle of the night, I was in the middle of searching for her."

Huang Rong sighed and said, "Guo'er, why did you have to risk your life again?"

Yang Guo gave a bitter laugh and shook his head, he said, "Auntie Guo, I'm not too bright, once my emotions get the better of me I can't control myself."

Huang Rong said, "Good child, you have a great heart, your father..." She stopped mid sentence.

Yang Guo's voice trembled, "Auntie Guo, my father was a bad person, wasn't he?"

Huang Rong's head hung down and said, "You want to know about it?" She suddenly called out, "Careful, come over here!" She pulled him over two piles of rock and avoided Jinlun Fawang's sneak attack.

Yang Guo took a look at the rock formation in awe, he said, "Auntie Guo, there isn't anyone one else in the world who has your intelligence and wisdom."

Huang Rong unsealed her daughter's pressure point and massaged her; she gave a slight smile but didn't reply.

Guo Fu said, "What do you know? My grandfather taught my mother's skills. My grandfather is as intelligent."

Yang Guo had seen the handwriting and articles of Huang Yaoshi before when he was on Peach Blossom Island but then he was young, he didn't understand the intricacies within it. When Guo Fu reminded him, he nodded and drifted away, he sighed and said, "When will I be able to greet this Senior? If I do my life won't be all in vain."

Suddenly Jinlun Fawang charged past two rock formations and attacked. Yang Guo didn't have a weapon and quickly picked up the stick that Huang Rong had flung on the ground and dashed out to stop him, he sent out two strokes with the stick, using the "Dog Beating Stick Technique". Jinlun Fawang saw that his stick technique was profound, he concentrated and fought with him, after a few stances, both of them suddenly tripped up on the jumbled rocks, both stumbled. Fawang was afraid that he would be ambushed and leapt out of the formation.

Huang Rong led Yang Guo back and ordered Guo Fu and the Wu brothers to move the stones and change the formation. She asked Yang Guo, "Where exactly did you learn this stick technique from?"

Yang Guo told her the truth about how he met Hong Qigong on Mount Hua, how the Northern Beggar dueled with Western Poison, how Hong Qigong taught him the "Dog Beating Stick Techniques". He then told her of the passing of both Hong Qigong and Ouyang Feng.

Huang Rong felt deep sorrow at this news, but then sighed and said, "You've come upon such extraordinary meetings; it really is rare to come across such events." She suddenly had a thought, and said, "Guo'er, you are very clever, think of a way to escape today's dangers."

Yang Guo looked at her, judging from her expression she had already thought of a plan, he pretended he didn't know

and said, "If you were feeling well, me and you could beat Fawang; or if we could get my Master to come here, then that would be a way as well."

Huang Rong said, "How can my health recover over such a short period of time? We don't know where your Master has gone. I have another plan; it involves the rock formation. This formation was devised by my father, there are hundred of variations; we haven't used even twenty percent of them yet." Yang Guo was shocked and pleased, he sighed in awe as he thought about the knowledge that Huang Yaoshi possessed.

Huang Rong said, "My Master only taught you the stances of the "Dog Beating Stick Technique", and you've only heard the main points of the formulae while you hid in the tree. I'm now going to teach you all the profound and subtle variations and changes of this technique."

Yang Guo was delighted but he pretended to dismiss this, he said, "I'm afraid that won't do, the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" is passed onto the Beggar Clan's Chief only, it has never been passed onto an outsider."

Huang Rong rolled her eyes, she said, "What are you trying in front of me now? My Master has taught you thirty percent of this technique, you learnt another twenty percent when you eavesdropped, today I'll teach you another twenty percent. The final thirty percent relies on your intelligence and how you grasp and understand the technique; no one can teach you this. One, no one is teaching you the whole thing, two, today's situation is desperate, just follow the order."

Yang Guo knelt down on the ground and bowed to her, he smiled and said, "Auntie Guo, when I was young you said

you were going to teach me martial arts, today you are teaching me.”

Huang Rong gave a subtle smile and said, “You’ve always bitterly kept this in your heart, haven’t you?”

Yang Guo said, “How would I dare?”

Huang Rong then quietly imparted all the aspects of the “Dog Beating Stick Technique” to him.

From outside the rock formation, Jinlun Fawang saw Yang Guo kowtowing to Huang Rong, the two of them laughed as they talked, he didn’t know what on earth they were trying now. It appeared that they were confident about the situation, and it looked like they weren’t even giving him a second thought. Though he was angry, he had always been careful and meticulous; though he knew that their martial arts could not compare with his, the two of them are extremely crafty. Why should he be careless and fall into their traps? He wanted to see through what they had in mind and then make his decision.

Luckily, he slowed his attacks; without the distraction of the enemy, Huang Rong passed on everything to Yang Guo in under an hour’s time.

Yang Guo’s intelligence and perception was a hundred times better than Lu Youjiao; if you asked him one thing he knew ten, if you ask him to raise one point he raised three. He had spent a great deal of effort in learning this technique and had pondered hundreds of times on the things he didn’t understand. Because of this fact, when Huang Rong advised and pointed him in the right direction, he immediately understood and grasped everything about the technique.

From afar, Jinlun Fawang saw that Huang Rong looked at ease, her lips moving slightly yet Yang Guo was scratching his ear and touching his cheeks; he didn't know what the two were conjuring up, most probably it wasn't to his best interests, he should break up their conversation.

After listening to the important aspects, Yang Guo asked ten or so difficult questions. Huang Rong explained it all to him. She said, "Good, since you can ask these questions then that means you understand a great deal. The second stage is to trap the monk in the formation."

Yang Guo was startled and said, "Capture him?"

Huang Rong said, "What's so hard about that? With you and I teamed up, we've got more intelligence and strength than needed. Right now, I'm going to explain the key points of this rock formation to you. You most probable won't be able to understand it in such a short time but luckily you have a great memory, all you've got to do is remember thirty six different types of changes." She then started to list them: how the green dragon appears as the white tiger, how the black forces transforms into the vermillion sparrow.

The rock formation was derived from Zhuge Liang's 'Central Map of the Eight Formations'. Years ago, Zhuge Liang had set up a formation on the shores of the Changjiang River using stone slabs. After Dong Wu's general Lu Xun entered the formation, it was difficult for him to escape.

Now, Huang Rong had set up one of Zhuge's methods, but because time was pressing, Huang Rong did not set up the formation completely, however only a few things were missing. Even so, the formation disturbed Jinlun Fawang, he stared at the five of them but he didn't dare make a move.

The thirty-six variations of this formation were very complicated, even with Yang Guo's intelligence he could only remember ten or so changes.

It was now evening, Jinlun Fawang slowly waited to make his move.

Huang Rong said, "With these ten or so changes; it's enough to trap him. Go out and lure him into the formation, I'll then change it and trap him in there."

Yang Guo was delighted and said, "Auntie Guo, if I visit Peach Blossom Island again, would you be willing to teach me this type of skill?"

Huang Rong gave a smile, and said, "If you are willing to visit the island, why wouldn't I be willing to teach you this? You risked your life and saved Fu'er and I twice now, could I still treat you the same way as before?"

When Yang Guo heard this, he was filled with an extremely relaxed and comfortable feeling throughout his chest; what does it matter whether Huang Rong teaches him or not? He felt that even if he had a hundred deaths he would not have any regrets. He raised his bamboo stick and exited the formation calling out, "Rusty old Jinlun Fawang if you've got guts then come over and go through three hundred stances with me!"

Jinlun Fawang was worried that they had planned something in the formation to ambush him; he couldn't have asked for more when he saw Yang Guo coming out of the formation. The iron wheel rang 'qiang lang lang' as he chopped out. He was afraid that Yang Guo would escape back into the formation if he started to lose; after the first two stances, he had already blocked his path back, forcing him as far away from the formation as possible.

How could he know that after Yang Guo learned the important aspects of the “Dog Beating Stick Technique” his technique was superb? When he used the eight key formulae of ‘trip’, ‘chop’, ‘coil’, ‘poke’, ‘stir’, ‘seal’, ‘lead’ and ‘turn’, the variations and changes were indeed subtle and ingenious. When he made a careless attack, Yang Guo poked him in the leg, though he managed to shut his pressure point to the danger and stop injury, the pain lasted a long time.

He didn’t dare be careless after he suffered that attack, he spun his wheel and concentrated on the battle; though his opponent was just a young man in his teens, he treated him as formidable enemy. He attacked with respect and defended tightly, looking upon him as a great Master.

When he did this, Yang Guo immediately felt he couldn’t hold on; though the “Dog Beating Stick” was ingenious, it is difficult to perform straight after learning it. Yang Guo used the ‘seal’ formulae to block the attack of the iron wheel and then shifted his legs, suddenly going east and then surging west.

Jinlun Fawang followed the changes of his bamboo stick, he felt that it was about time to act. When he saw Yang Guo surging and attacking away from the formation Fawang kept on moving backwards to lure him as faraway from the formation as possible. He didn’t predicted that after moving back over ten or so steps, his right leg suddenly tripped over a large rock; he had unwittingly been lured into the formation.

He knew something was wrong. He then heard Huang Rong call out, “The Vermillion Sparrow Displaces the Green Dragon, the ‘Xun’ position changes to the ‘Li’, wood into water.”

Guo Fu and the Wu brothers shifted the rocks and changed the formation. Jinlun Fawang's face lost its colour from shock, he stopped his wheel to inspect the surroundings, while Yang Guo's bamboo stick coiled its way around towards him. Though Yang Guo's "Dog Beating Stick Technique" wasn't good enough to meet him head on, it was more than enough to confuse and distract him. Fawang's legs were tripped up a few times and he almost couldn't stand up. He knew that this formation was powerful, the longer he was in it the more confusing it became. In this danger he shouted and leaped up on top of a pile of rocks. Normally, being on top of the rocks keeps one from being trapped and confused by the formation and allows them to regain their sense of direction. He thought that if he went forward in a straight line he will be able to get out of the formation. But he didn't know that he just went from east to west, north to south, and had circled around a couple of times over an area of a hundred feet. Eventually his vigor was depleted and he stopped on the rocks. As soon as he landed on top of the pile of rocks, Yang Guo waved out the bamboo stick to his leg. Fawang's weapon was short and couldn't be used to protect all of his body; he could only drop down back to the ground and sweep out his wheel to counterattack.

After another ten or so moves, the sky had darkened, he was surrounded by rocks everywhere; the formation seemed to give off an eerie air. Even someone as bold as he couldn't stop himself from being slightly frightened, suddenly his mind lit up; he had a plan.

His left leg lifted up, a twenty plus kilo (44lb) stone was lifted in the air and sent flying. His right leg came out and another large stone went flying. He darted around, his legs kept on kicking out, the rocks collided with each other and sparks flew. In a flash, the formation had been broken.

Huang Rong, Yang Guo and the others were extremely shocked by this and they had to keep on moving to avoid the rocks falling from the sky.

If Jinlun Fawang just wanted to leave the formation it couldn't be easier, but he turned defense into attack and his left palm came searching out to capture Huang Rong. Yang Guo sent the tip of the stick towards his back, Fawang swerved his iron wheel and repelled it; however, his left palm had hung onto Huang Rong's shoulder. If she leapt back she could have avoided this but she heard a urgent gust of wind coming down, a large rock was smashing down behind her at that time, she could only use the "Great Trapping Hand" to reverse his grab and hooked onto his left wrist.

Jinlun Fawang said, "Good!" He let her hook his left wrist and waited for her to use force to fling him away; he suddenly circulated his strength and pulled her towards him.

If it was any other time, Huang Rong could have circulated her internal energy and escaped from this pull, but right now she didn't have sufficient internal energy, she called out, "Ai ya!" and fell.

Yang Guo was extremely alarmed; he threw away any care for his life and threw himself forward, grabbing Jinlun Fawang's legs. The two of them started to fall.

Jinlun Fawang's martial arts were much higher than his, before they hit the ground, his right palm had come waving out towards Yang Guo's chest. Yang Guo quickly stretched out his left arm to block it; a 'pai' sound was heard as their palms struck. Yang Guo felt blood surging upwards from his chest; his body flew away like a rock.

Just at this time, the last remaining rock fell down fiercely from the sky; a 'peng' sound was heard as it struck Jinlun Fawang on the back.

It was an extremely heavy collision, even if Jinlun Fawang's internal energy were higher, he would not be able to take it, though he circulated his internal energy to divert the rock away, his body wobbled a few times and he eventually fell forward onto the ground.

In a short period of time, the formation had been broken and stones had rained down. Huang Rong, Jinlun Fawang and Yang Guo were all on the ground injured.

End of Chapter 14.

Chapter 15 - The Disciples of Eastern Heretic

Translated by Noodles



*Yang Guo saw a girl in blue green by the window,
her left hand was holding down a piece of paper,*

her right holding a pen, she was in the middle of doing calligraphy. Her back was towards the couch and he couldn't see her face, her back was slender with a fine waist, extremely elegant and beautiful.

Inside the formation were the extremely shocked Wu brothers and Guo Fu; outside the formation were Da'erba and the Mongolian warriors. They dashed forward to rescue Fawang. Da'erba had terrifying strength, there were many skilled fighters within the crowd of Mongolian warriors; how could Guo Fu and the Wu brothers fight them off? Suddenly a swaying Jinlun Fawang stood up and waved his iron wheel, the 'qiang lang lang' sounds were soul disturbing, his face was pale. He laughed out at the sky yet his laugh was filled with a cold and mournful feeling; the band of people all looked at each other startled and stopped their advance.

Jinlun Fawang hissed, "I have never suffered even half an injury whilst in battle in my entire life; today I actually injured myself." He stretched out his hand and grabbed Huang Rong's back.

Yang Guo's chest was severely injured by Jinlun Fawang's palm, he didn't have any strength to stand up and crawled across the ground; when he saw Huang Rong in danger he again swept out his stick to repel this grab. But as soon as he used any strength, he spat out a pool of blood.

Huang Rong said mournfully, "Guo'er, we give in, don't fight on, take care of yourself."

Guo Fu raised her long sword and protected her mother.

Yang Guo quietly said, "Sister Fu, run away quickly, it's important to tell your father about this."

Guo Fu's mind was in a mess, she knew her martial arts were poor but how could she leave her mother?

Jinlun Fawang swung his iron wheel slightly and the wheel collided with Guo Fu's sword, a 'dang' sound was heard and a white light glimmered, the sword flew up into the air and landed in the forest.

Jinlun Fawang was about to push her out of the way and grab Huang Rong when suddenly a girl's voice from behind said, "Wait!"

A blue green flash leapt out of the forest. She stretched out her hand to catch the sword and hurried to the middle of the pile of rocks.

Jinlun Fawang saw that her face was extremely terrifying; it looked three parts human and seven parts ghost, he has never seen such a strange face before in his life. He couldn't stop himself from being startled and said, "Who are you?"

The young girl didn't answer and pushed a rock in between Jinlun Fawang and Huang Rong. She said, "You're the famous Jinlun Fawang?" Her face was ugly but her voice was gentle and tender.

Fawang said, "Correct, what is your name?"

The girl replied, "I'm a nameless young girl, you won't know me." As she said this, she moved another slab of stone three inches.

The sun had gone down long ago; the forest was full of darkness. Jinlun Fawang's mind lit up and shouted, "What are you doing?" He was about to stop the girl from moving

the stones when she suddenly called out, "The Horned Wooden Dragon Changes into the Overbearing Golden Dragon!"

Guo Fu and the Wu brothers were startled and they all pondered, "How does she know the changes of the formation?" But they heard her voice had a commanding tone and immediately started to move the rocks according to her instructions. Four, fives stones were moved, the scattered formation changed again.

Jinlun Fawang was alarmed and angry, he shouted, "Little girl, you dare to come and mess things around!"

He just heard her say, "The Moon Fox Turns into the Day Rabbit, the Crow of the Final Moon Shifts into the Wooden Wolf of 'Kui', Bat of the Earth Enters the Room of the Fire Pig." All the things that she called out were the twenty-eight positions of 'su'. Guo Fu and the Wu brothers felt that the way she led the formation was exactly the way that Huang Rong did while she led formations. They were delighted and used all their efforts in moving the rocks; they saw that they were about to trap Jinlun Fawang in the formation again.

Jinlun Fawang had circulated his internal energy with force to protect himself from the wound from the collision with the rock; though the injury didn't react for now, he actually had a serious internal injury. He had no way to start kicking the stones again. He knew that in just a little while he would be trapped in the stone formation again; his disciple Da'erba was brave but he doesn't understand the formation and so it would be difficult for him to help. He saw that Huang Rong was picking herself up, struggling to stand upright; all he needed to do was take a few steps forward and he would be able to capture her. But saving himself was

more important right now; he picked up his iron wheel and sent an attack towards Wu Xiuwen's head.

After he suffered the injury his arms had no strength; he was forcing himself to move the iron wheel. If Wu Xiuwen had a sword, he would be able to knock the wheel out of his hands. But Fawang was surrounded by a powerful air; though the stance had no force behind it, it still looked like the real thing. How could Wu Xiuwen dare to take this attack; he immediately withdrew back into the formation.

Jinlun Fawang slowly walked out of the formation and stood there in a daze for a while thinking, "I'm afraid that I'll never get an opportunity as good as this again. Could it be that heaven is protecting the Song and stopping me from succeeding? The Wulin of the central plain have many able people; these few youngsters are already versed in both the arts and martial arts. Just they alone make strong opponents; our Mongolian and Tibetan warriors pale by comparison." He held his chest and sighed. He turned around and walked away. Ten or so steps later, a 'qiang lang lang' sound was heard; the wheel had fallen to the ground as he struggled to stay up.

Da'erba was alarmed and called out, "Master!" He dashed over and held him up and said, "Master, are you alright?" Fawang frowned and didn't reply, he stretched out his arm and leaned on his shoulder and quietly said, "What a pity! What a pity! Let's go!" A Mongolian warrior led a horse over. Due to his injury, Jinlun Fawang had no strength to pull himself up on the horse. Da'erba used his left palm and pushed his master's waist and helped him up on the horse. They left heading east.

The girl in blue green slowly walked towards Yang Guo. She stopped and bent down to examine his face, wanting to see how seriously injured he was. It was now deep into the

night; things couldn't be seen clearly even if it was just a distance of one inch away from your face. She went up to Yang Guo's face and saw that his eyes were open wide, seemingly in a trance; his cheeks were red and his breathing rapid, it appeared that his injury was not light.

In this blurry state, all he saw was a pair of soft and gentle eyes in front of his face, like the way Xiao Longnu's eyes appeared when she looked at him. It was soft and gentle, understanding and caring, he opened his arms and grabbed the girl and called out, "Gu Gu, Guo'er is hurt, don't leave me."

The girl in blue green was embarrassed and flustered, she struggled slightly. Yang Guo's chest immediately suffered a flash of pain and he couldn't stop himself from calling out 'ai ya!'

The girl didn't dare to struggle and quietly said, "I'm not your Gu Gu; let me go."

Yang Guo stared at her eyes and pleaded, "Gu Gu, don't leave me... I'm... I'm... I'm your Guo'er."

The girl's heart softened and said gently, "I'm not your Gu Gu."

The sky was even darker now; the girl's terrifying face was hidden, showing only a pair of bright pupils.

Yang Guo pulled her hand and pleaded, "You are, you are! Don't... don't leave me again."

The young girl was held by him. Her body burnt up with embarrassment; she didn't know what to do.

Suddenly Yang Guo's mind became clear; he saw that the girl in front of him was not Xiao Longnu. He was extremely disappointed, his mind turned upside down and he fainted.

The young girl was shocked. She saw Guo Fu and the Wu brothers surrounding Huang Rong, showing concern and serving her yet Yang Guo had no one. She knew that his injury was serious, if he doesn't take her Master's medicine, his life will be in danger. She supported his waist and pushed and pulled him out of the formation and then slowly walked out of the forest. The skinny horse was very sharp; it recognized its master and rushed towards him. The girl put him on the horse's back but she didn't get on, she held the horse's reigns and walked on.

Yang Guo was conscious one moment and in a daze the next; sometimes he thought that the person next to him was Xiao Longnu and he called out in delight; other times he found out that she wasn't and his whole body felt as if it was in an ice cellar.

After sometime, he felt a clear fragrance enter the places where his chest was injured, it was extremely comfortable. He was startled and discovered that he was now lying on a couch, a thin blanket covered his body; he wanted to sit up but suddenly felt a severe pain going through his chest, he couldn't move. He turned his head and saw a girl in blue green by the window; her left hand was holding down a piece of paper, her right holding a brush, she was in the middle of doing calligraphy. Her back was towards the couch and he couldn't see her face; her back was slender with a fine waist, extremely elegant and beautiful. He took a look around and found out that he was in the room of a thatch house; the benches, chairs, table and bed were all simple and crude, the four walls were gloomy, yet it felt peaceful and serene. Beside the bed were a long zither and a jade flute. All he remembered was how he fought with Jinlun Fawang in the forest but his mind was a blank as to how he got to this place. He concentrated harder and recalled that he was on his horse's back; someone was

leading them, a girl. Now he remembered, the girl in front of him was that girl.

She was now concentrating on her calligraphy; he saw her arm moved lightly, her form graceful and elegant. There wasn't a sound in the room; it felt like he had arrived in a completely different world to the heated battle he had just been in. He didn't dare to make a noise and disturb the young girl, he just lay down on the couch peacefully; it was like settling down again after a dream, he really didn't know what world he was in.

His mind suddenly lit up, the girl in blue green in front of him was the girl who gave him the warning on the Changan road, and later on she helped him save Lu Wushuang. There were no ties between him and her, why was she treating him so well? He couldn't stop his mouth from opening, "Sister, so it's you who has saved me again."

The girl stopped her brush but she didn't turn around, she said softly, "You can't really say I saved you. I happened to be passing by and saw how unreasonable that Tibetan monk was, and you were injured as well..." She lowered her head slightly after she said this.

Yang Guo said, "Sister, I... I..." He was touched but his throat choked up and he couldn't make a sound.

The young girl said, "You have a good heart; you save other people without regard for your life. I just gave a little help; it's nothing."

Yang Guo said, "Auntie Guo raised me, of course I had to use all my efforts in saving her when she was in danger, but sister and I..."

The young girl said, "I'm not talking about your Auntie Guo, I'm talking about Lu Wushuang sister Lu."

Yang Guo hadn't heard the name Lu Wushuang for a long time, when he heard her mention this name he quickly asked, "Is Miss Lu safe? Has she recovered from her injury?"

The young girl replied, "Thank you for your concern, she has recovered from her injury. You haven't forgotten her."

From her tone, Yang Guo could tell that she and Lu Wushuang are very close. He asked, "I wonder how sister greets Miss Lu?"

The young girl didn't reply, she gave a subtle smile and said, "Don't call me elder sister this, elder sister that, I'm not older than you." After a while, she laughed and said, "I'm afraid that it's a bit too late now to change your greeting after calling me 'Gu Gu' a few times."

Yang Guo's face went red; he knew that when he was dazed and unclear after the injury, he must have wrongly recognized her as Xiao Longnu, incessantly calling out, 'Gu Gu'. It could be that he also said some tender and affectionate things, the more he thought about it, the more uneasy he got, he stuttered, "You... you... you're not offended are you?"

The young girl laughed and said, "Of course I'm not offended; just rest here peacefully. You can search for your Gu Gu when you've recovered from your injury." She continued, "Don't be too worried, you'll eventually find her."

Those few words were affectionate and considerate and within the softness there was respect; it made a person feel at ease and happy. This was completely different to all the other girls he knew. She wasn't like Lu Wushuang who was vivacious and wily, and even further away from the unrestrained pride of Guo Fu. Yelu Yan was straight to the point and Wanyan Ping was long-suffering and piteous.

When it came to Xiao Longnu: at first she was cold as frost and unfeeling, but eventually she fell in love and all her emotions were stirred and brought forward. This girl in blue green was cultured and refined, warm and attentive. She knew that he missed his 'Gu Gu' so she advised him to rest peacefully first, and once he had recovered he could go and find her. He felt that being with her made him feel relaxed and calm. After she said these words she picked up her brush again.

Yang Guo said, "Sister, what is your surname?"

The girl said, "Don't ask questions, just rest peacefully on the bed and stop thinking so much, your injury will recover quicker."

Yang Guo said, "Fine. Actually, I knew that I was asking in vain, you wouldn't even let me see your face let alone know your name."

The young girl sighed and said, "My face is ugly, you've seen it before."

Yang Guo said, "No...no! That's when you had the human skin mask on."

The young girl said, "If I'm as beautiful as your Gu Gu, why do I need to wear this mask?"

Yang Guo was pleased when she praised Xiao Longnu's beauty, he asked, "How do you know my Gu Gu is beautiful? You've seen her before?"

The young girl said, "I haven't seen her before. But the way you think about her, spell bound and completely enchanted, she must be the number one beauty in the world."

Yang Guo sighed and said, "I long for her not because of her beauty, even if she was the ugliest woman in the world, I

would still long for her like this. But... but if you see her yourself you will definitely praise her beauty even more."

If Guo Fu or Lu Wushuang heard these words, they would definitely answer back with some chiding comment; but this young girl replied, "It must be true. Not only is she beautiful, she treats you extremely well." After she said this, she continued on with her calligraphy.

Yang Guo looked up at the ceiling for a while, but he couldn't stop himself from turning around and facing the slender back of the young girl. He asked, "Sister, what are you writing?"

The young girl replied, "I'm practicing calligraphy."

Yang Guo said, "What 'bei tie' (beautiful calligraphy written on silk/beautifully presented calligraphy) are you copying?"

The young girl replied, "My writing is ugly, how can one describe it as a copy of a 'bei tie'."

Yang Guo said, "You're too modest, I can tell it's definitely great."

The young girl laughed and said, "Strange, how can you tell?"

Yang Guo said, "Someone as elegant and refined as you must have calligraphy that is also elegant and refined. Sister, how about letting me look at what you've written?"

The young girl gave another light laugh and said, "My writing can't see the light of day; I'll need to ask you for lessons when you've recovered."

Yang Guo secretly said, "Shameful." He couldn't stop himself from appreciating the lessons of literature and calligraphy that Huang Rong taught him on Peach Blossom

Island. If he didn't have that experience, he wouldn't be able to tell what someone was writing let alone distinguish the difference between beautiful and ugly calligraphy.

As he was lost in thought, he felt a throbbing pain in his chest. Immediately he circulated his internal energy, chi flowing through his pressure points. He gradually felt comfortable and at ease and soon he fell into a deep sleep.

By the time he woke up, the sky had already gone dark. The girl had prepared a few dishes and had put them on a short table next to the bed he was on. She helped him to eat. Though the bamboo chopsticks and clay bowl were coarse implements, they were all new and specially prepared for him.

The dishes were nothing special, just ordinary vegetables, tofu, eggs and fish, but they were all cooked deliciously. Yang Guo ate three bowls of rice in one go and kept on praising her cooking. Though her face was hidden by the mask and covered her expression, her bright eyes showed signs of delight.

Yang Guo's injury had recovered a little more by the next day. The young girl had moved a chair next to the end of the bed. She sat there and mended his long gown. She lifted up the gown and said, "How can a person like you wear something like this?" After she said this she left the room and returned with a roll of blue green fabric and started to prepare a gown according to the fitting of his old one.

From her voice and figure, she was no older than seventeen or eighteen; but not only was she like an older sister to Yang Guo, she was tender and loving to him like a mother. His mother had passed away a long time ago but today he experienced the feeling of being that child once again; he

was touched and surprised and asked, "Sister, why are you treating me so well? I really can't accept it."

The young girl replied, "What's so difficult about making a gown? You risked your life to save someone; that was a much harder task."

The morning of that day passed peacefully. After midday, the girl once again sat at the table and practiced calligraphy. Yang Guo really wanted to see what she was writing but after pleading a few times she still said no. She practiced for about two hours; she wrote one piece and then thought for a while before she ripped it up and started another piece. It appeared that she couldn't get what she wanted; she wrote a piece and then ripped it up. It seemed like she was writing some sort of martial arts manual. Eventually she gave a sigh and asked, "What do you want to eat, I'll make something for you."

Yang Guo had an idea and said, "I'm afraid that it might be too time consuming."

The young girl said, "What? Tell me."

Yang Guo said, "I want to eat zong zi (glutinous rice dumplings wrapped in leaves)."

The young girl was startled and said, "What's so hard about wrapping a few zong? I'd like to eat some myself. Do you like sweet or savory ones?"

Yang Guo said, "Whichever is fine. As long as I can eat some I'll be satisfied, how can I be picky?"

Indeed, that night the young girl did wrap up a few zong zi for him. The sweet ones were filled with soy beans, the savory filled with ham; they were both delicious. Yang Guo ate and praised her incessantly at the same time.

The young girl sighed and said, "You really are clever, you've finally guessed who I am."

Yang Guo was surprised and thought, "I haven't guessed! How have I guessed who you are?" But his reply was, "How did you know?"

The young girl replied, "Jiangnan, my home, is famous for its zong zi; there were many things for you to pick from but you had to pick zong zi."

Yang Guo recalled the events of years ago in Zhexi where he met the Guo couple, the fight with Li Mochou, how he became Ouyang Feng's godson but he could not remember who this girl was.

He wanted to eat zong zi for another reason. When he finished eating, he waited for the moment when the young girl was not looking and placed a piece in his palm. When the girl collected up the chopsticks and bowls, he quickly took a piece of fabric that the girl had left behind when she was making the gown for him and attached some zong to one end and then shot it out towards the pieces of torn paper on the table. When he pulled a piece back and took a look, he couldn't stop himself from being startled. The words that were on the paper were: 'since a gentleman has passed my eyes, the clouds are not pleasant.' That phrase was from the 'Shi Jing'. Years ago Huang Rong had taught him the meaning of this phrase: 'since I've seen such a man, how come I am not pleased?' He shot out the piece of cloth again for another piece. The same thing was written on it but the 'since' word was torn in half. Yang Guo's heart ran, he had collected ten pieces of paper but the same thing was written on all of them. He carefully thought about the meaning and went off into a daydream.

Suddenly, he heard footsteps, the young girl was returning to the room. Yang Guo quickly hid the pieces of paper underneath his blanket. The young girl gathered up the rest of the pieces of paper and burned them outside.

Yang Guo thought, "She wrote 'since a gentleman has passed my eyes', could that gentleman be me? I've only spoken a few words with her, what could she see in me that she likes? Anyway, how can someone describe me as a gentleman? But if it isn't me, who else can it be since there's no one else around."

Just as he was in deep thought, the girl returned to the room. She stood quietly by the window for a while and then blew out the candle. The pale light of the moon shone through the window, covering the floor.

Yang Guo called out, "Sister."

But the young girl did not reply and slowly left the room.

After a while, he heard the sound of a flute coming through the window. Yang Guo had seen her use a jade flute to fight with Li Mochou, her martial arts weren't weak; her musical skills with the flute were great as well.

During his time in the Ancient Tomb, Xiao Longnu would occasionally play the zither and he would sit by the side and listen to her explain the meaning of songs; thus he was coarsely learned in music. He could tell that she was playing a tune of 'Wu She Shang', the song of 'qi ao'. This song was peaceful and serene; Yang Guo had heard it a few times but he didn't love it. He heard that she kept on repeating the first five phrases, 'Looking into the distance of the mysterious Qi, the green bamboo aplenty, there's a gentleman, like a clean cut, polished and carved jade.' Whether it's high or low, whether there are sudden drops and rises, the tunes are variations of these five phrases,

winding and drowning in its meanings. Yang Guo knew that these five phrases also came from the 'Shi Jing', it praises the elegance of a male, cut and polished elegantly like the smoothness of beautiful jade.

Yang Guo listened for a while and couldn't stop himself from quietly reciting, "Looking into the distance of the mysterious Qi, the green bamboo aplenty..." The flute suddenly stopped after these two phrases. Yang Guo was startled and lamented his actions, "She was playing the flute to comfort herself; by quietly reciting those lines I showed that I understood what she was thinking, that is a bit too impolite."

When the young girl brought breakfast in the next morning, she saw that Yang Guo was wearing the human skin mask, she was taken aback, and then laughed and she said, "Why are you wearing that?"

Yang Guo said, "You gave this to me; you don't want to show your true face so I'm wearing this."

The young girl said calmly, "That's fine." After she said this she placed the breakfast down and left the room; she didn't say anything else to him that day.

Yang Guo was feeling uneasy; he was afraid that he had offended her and wanted to say a few apologetic words. She didn't stop in the room for the rest of the day. Later on during the evening, she waited for Yang Guo to finish eating supper before returning to collect the bowls and chopsticks; as she was about to leave, Yang Guo said, "Sister, you play the flute really well, can you play a tune for me?"

The young girl gave a subtle moan and then said, "Fine." She left the room and collected her jade flute. She returned and sat by Yang Guo's bed, playing a tune on the flute. This

time she played the song 'Ying Xian Ke' (Meeting the Divine Guest), it was a graceful and joyous tune, a song that greets a guest.

Yang Guo thought, "So your flute also wear's a mask, not willing to show the song that is in your heart."

Suddenly, the sound of footsteps could be heard in the midst of the flute's music; someone was hurrying towards this place. The young girl placed the flute down and went to the door, calling out, "Cousin!"

Someone rushed to the house and was panting as they said, "Cousin, that witch has picked up our traces and she's on her way now; let's go!"

Yang Guo was pleased when he heard Lu Wushuang's voice, but he was alarmed when he heard that witch Li Mochou was on the way. He then thought, "So that girl is Wifey's cousin."

He heard the young girl say, "Someone's injured and is recuperating inside."

Lu Wushuang said, "Who?"

The young girl replied, "The person that saved your life."

Lu Wushuang replied, "Sha Dan! He's... he's in there!! She dashed into the room as she said this.

The joy and delight on her face could be seen in the moonlight; she called out, "Sha Dan, Sha Dan! How come you're here? This time, it seems like it's your turn to be the injured one."

Yang Guo said, "Wifey..." He could only say one word before he thought about the elegant and refined young girl in blue

green standing aside, he stopped joking and took back his words, he asked, "How did Li Mochou find you again?"

Lu Wushuang said, "After that battle at the restaurant, you suddenly left and my cousin took me to this place to recuperate. Actually, I recovered from my wound a long time ago; I was feeling bored so I went to Xianguang for a little while. That day, I bumped into two beggars, I eavesdropped on them and heard that there was a 'Heroes' gathering at Da Xingguan. I hurried to Da Xingguan to take a look but by the time I got there, it had finished. I was afraid that my cousin was worrying about me so I hurried back. Outside a teashop at the town ahead, I saw that witch's donkey, her donkey has changed but the ringing of the golden bell hasn't..." As she got to this point, her voice trembled as she continued, "At least my time wasn't up yet, if I had bumped into her head on, I wouldn't have been able to see you two."

Yang Guo said, "This girl is your cousin? She saved me but I still don't know her name."

The young girl replied, "I..."

Lu Wushuang suddenly stretched out her hand and pulled their masks off at the same time and said, "That witch is going to get here soon; why are you two still mucking around with these masks at a time like this?"

A bright light shone in Yang Guo's eyes; the young girl had an oval face that sparkled, her skin glimmered like snow; though her beauty couldn't match Xiao Longnu's, she was still an extremely beautiful girl.

Lu Wushuang said, "She's my cousin Cheng Ying, a disciple of the Master of Peach Blossom Island, Master Huang."

Yang Guo bowed and greeted her, "Miss Cheng."

Cheng Ying returned the greeting and said, "Young Hero Yang."

Yang Guo thought, "She's of such a young age, yet she's actually a disciple of Island Master Huang? Counting back from Auntie Guo's status, doesn't that mean I'm a generation lower than her?"

Years ago when she was captured by Li Mochou and almost lost her life by the Scarlet Serpent Deity's hand, it was Peach Blossom Island's Island Master Huang Yaoshi who rescued her while passing by. After his daughter married, Huang Yaoshi roamed Jianghu making the world his home. He was old and by himself, so it was unavoidable that he would get lonely. When he saw that Cheng Ying was weak and had no where else to go, he couldn't stop himself from pitying her. After he cured her poison, he took her with him. Cheng Ying served him carefully and meticulously. This was much better than the naughty, restless and unruly Huang Rong. Huang Yaoshi grew from his pity to love her and took her in as his disciple. Though Cheng Ying's intelligence could not compare to Huang Rong's, she was extremely careful and paid attention to everything. She studied the lesser points but she still managed to learn a considerable number of skills from Huang Yaoshi.

This year, her martial arts became able and she told her Master that she was going north to search for her cousin. On the Guanxia road, she bumped into Yang Guo and Lu Wushuang; it was she who gave the warnings along the way and she who gave news of Lu Wushuang's capture. After the battle with Li Mochou in the restaurant with all the other youngsters, she took Lu Wushuang to a secluded place and built a hut to allow her to recuperate.

The day before, Lu Wushuang had left by herself and had not returned after a long period of time. Cheng Ying

worried about her and went out in search of her. Instead of finding her, she saw Huang Rong using the stone formations to fend off Jinlun Fawang. She had learned the formations from Huang Yaoshi; although she didn't know much, the things that she did know were learned thoroughly. And so, by coincidence, she managed to rescue Yang Guo.

Lu Wushuang said, "In a situation like this, why are you two still so formal?"

Yang Guo said, "Did Li Mochou see you eventually."

Lu Wushuang said, "You really are naïve! If she saw me and you weren't there to rescue me, how would I be able to escape from her? As soon as I heard the donkey's bell, I hid behind the teahouse; I didn't even dare to breath. I heard her ask the manager of the teahouse if he had seen two girls, one was a little lame and the other one was an extremely ugly girl. Cousin, she said you were an ugly girl, but she didn't know that you are the exact opposite, a beautiful girl..."

Cheng Ying's face went slightly red and said, "Don't talk rubbish, Young Hero Yang will laugh."

Yang Guo said, "I can't take a title such as Young Hero Yang; just call me Yang Guo."

Lu Wushuang angrily said, "As soon as you saw my cousin, you're all nice and polite; you even told her your name, yet with me you lied and messed me around."

Yang Guo gave a light laugh and said, "You called me 'Sha Dan', I listened to your orders and pretended to be a 'Sha Dan', isn't that obedient enough?"

Lu Wushuang pouted and said, "I'll deal with you later on." She turned around to Cheng Ying and said, "Cousin, whenever you went into town to buy things, you would wear your mask, the townspeople recognized you. The manager of the teahouse could never have dreamed that a courteous and polite Taoist priestess would have ill intentions, so of course he would tell her where we are. The witch thanked him and asked him where she can seek lodgings and then she took apprentice sister Hong to search. She has always killed people at the first light of day; it looks like we've got six hours."

Cheng Ying said, "Yes. That day when she attacked cousin's home, it was 'yin mo mao chu fen' (I think it's the fourth hour)." The three of them talked about how Li Mochou killed Lu Wushuang's parents and then realized that they had met before in Jiaxing when they were kids. The cousins recalled staying in the old kiln that Yang Guo lived in, and then remembered that they have indeed met before; they all felt a close and intimate feeling.

Yang Guo said, "That witch's martial arts are extremely high; even if I wasn't injured, the three of us would not be able to beat her. Let's just leave everything as it is, leave the lamps lit and escape."

Cheng Ying nodded and said, "We've got six hours left. Brother Yang's horse has great speed and stamina, if we leave now the witch might not be able to catch up."

Lu Wushuang said, "Sha Dan, you're injured, can you still ride?"

Yang Guo sighed and said, "I can't but I'll force myself; at least it's better than falling into the hands of that witch."

Lu Wushuang said, "We've only got one horse. Cousin, take Sha Dan and head west, I'll head east and lure her away."

Cheng Ying's face went slightly red. She said, "No, you go with brother Yang. I don't have any ties or debts with Li Mochou, even if I do fall into her hands, she might not harm me; if you fall into her hands, you'll suffer."

Lu Wushuang said, "She came for me, if she sees me with him, won't his life be lost in vain because of me?" The cousins reasoned with each other, trying to push the other into accompanying Yang Guo in escaping.

Yang Guo was extremely touched by this, these two girls were filled with loyalty, yet in this danger they were both willing to risk their lives for him; even if I die at the hands of this witch, my life wouldn't exactly have been lived for no purpose.

He then heard Lu Wushuang ask, "Sha Dan, say something, do you want my cousin to go with you or me?"

Before Yang Guo replied, Cheng Ying said, "Why do you keep on calling him Sha Dan this, Sha Dan that, are you not afraid of making brother Yang angry at all?"

Lu Wushuang stuck out her tongue, she laughed and said, "Look at how courteous and considerate you are to him; brother Sha would definitely want you to go with him." Changing her greeting from 'Sha Dan' to 'Brother Sha' was her way of showing her sincerity.

Cheng Ying's face was distinctly white and it was very easy to make her blush, so when Lu Wushuang said this, Cheng Ying's face immediately turned red as a rose. She gave a slight laugh and said, "He calls you 'Wifey', doesn't he? How can the wife not go along with him?"

This time it was Lu Wushuang's turn to blush. She stretched out her hand and tried to tickle Cheng Ying; Cheng Ying turned around and leapt away. In a short while, the room

felt as if a gentle relaxing breeze was blowing through the room, the three of them didn't appear to be as worried and frightened as they were at the start.

Yang Guo thought, "If Miss Cheng escapes with me, then Wifey's life would be in danger. If Wifey goes with me, then Miss Cheng would be in extreme danger." He said, "I am extremely touched by the way you two treat me. I say that you two should escape and let me handle the witch. My master and she are apprentice sisters; she would still have some respect towards that relationship. Not only that, she's afraid of my master, she wouldn't dare to do anything to me..."

Before he finished, Lu Wushuang interrupted, "That won't do...that won't do."

Yang Guo knew that the two would not abandon the other so he said clearly, "The three of us will escape together. If we do encounter that witch then we'll fight for our lives; whether we live or die, let the heavens decide."

Lu Wushuang clapped her hands and said, "Fine, let's do that."

Cheng Ying said grimly, "That witch comes and goes like the wind, if the three of us travel together, she will definitely catch up with us. We're going to fight with her on the way so why don't we remain here and wait for her to come when she's exhausted."

Yang Guo said, "That's right. Sister knows how to use formations, she could even trap that monk Jinlun Fawang, the Scarlet Serpent Deity may not be able to break through it."

Once he said this, the three's eyes lit up softly.

Cheng Ying said, "That formation was set up by Mrs. Guo, I just added a few variations to it, I can never set something up like that. We'll do our best and let fate decide. Cousin, come and help me."

Yang Guo thought, "When Auntie Guo taught me the formation, I could only remember ten or so different types and it could only be used to lure the rusty Jinlun Fawang into the formation; it would have no use in blocking that heaven hating and world resenting Li Mochou. This type of art is extremely complicated; to be well versed in it requires at least one year's worth of work. Miss Cheng is young so of course the things that she has learned cannot compare with Auntie Guo, she wasn't trying to be modest. But no matter how simple and crude her formation is, it's better than nothing."

The two girls picked up an iron shovel and a hoe, they went outside and started to dig up earth and move stones as they started to set up the formation. They had worked urgently for two hours when the faint calls of cockerels could be heard from faraway. Cheng Ying's head was covered with sweat as she looked at her efforts. She saw that her formation was miles apart from the rock formation that Huang Rong had set up; she was slightly depressed as she thought, "Mrs. Guo's talents exceeds mine by a hundred times over. It really would be extremely difficult to try to fend off the Scarlet Serpent Deity with such a coarse earth formation." She was afraid that her cousin and Yang Guo would get depressed about it so she did not tell them her thoughts.

Under the moonlight, Lu Wushuang saw something was wrong with her cousin and knew that her cousin wasn't completely confident. She took out a book from her pockets and returned to the hut and handed the book over to Yang

Guo. She said, "Sha Dan, this is my master's 'Five Poison Codex'."

Yang Guo shivered slightly at the sight of the blood covered book.

Lu Wushuang said, "I lied to her about the book falling into the Beggar Clan's hands; if she catches me she will definitely search me and discover the book. Take a good look and once you've memorized it, burn it." She had never talked in a serious manner with Yang Guo before, but she had no interest in joking around in this time of danger. Yang Guo saw her expression was bleak and just nodded and accepted the book.

Lu Wushuang also took out a handkerchief and quietly said to him, "If you're unlucky and fall into the hands of that witch, when she wants to take your life give this handkerchief to her."

Yang Guo saw that one side of the handkerchief looked that it was torn from somewhere, the embroidered red flower on the handkerchief was torn in half, he didn't know what she meant by this and was startled, he did not take it and asked, "What is this?"

Lu Wushuang, "I'm asking you to give this to her, are you going to promise me?"

Yang Guo nodded and placed it by the side of the pillow. Lu Wushuang picked it up and put it in his pockets and whispered, "Don't let my cousin know." She suddenly smelt the manly scent on him and remembered how he undressed her and helped her fix her broken rib in place on the Guanxia road. And how they slept on the same bed; her heart stirred and she stared at him in a trance before turning around and leaving the room.

Yang Guo saw that her eyes were filled with boundless love, his heart raced. He opened the 'Five Poison Codex' and flipped through a few pages and remembered the antidote to the "Five Poison Palm" and the "Soul Freezing Silver Needles". He thought, "These two antidotes are both extremely hard to create but if I don't die today, these two antidotes will eventually have a use later."

He heard the hut's door creak as someone pushed opened the door. He raised his head and saw Cheng Ying with red cheeks, she came over to the bed and he could see pearls of sweat on her forehead. Her breathing was slightly fast. She said, "Brother Yang, the earth formation that I have set outside is not good enough to hold back the Scarlet Serpent Deity." She then took out a handkerchief from her pockets and offered it to him. She continued, "If she breaks through and enters the house, give this to her."

Yang Guo saw that it was only half a handkerchief, the decoration and quality was the same as the one that Lu Wushuang gave him. He was surprised and raised his head, his eyes met hers and he saw eyes that glistened with tears, she was embarrassed and pleased at the same time. He was about to ask further when Cheng Ying suddenly blushed and whispered, "Whatever you do, don't let my cousin know about this." When she finished, she swiftly exited.

Yang Guo took out the handkerchief that Lu Wushuang gave him and lifted it up. Indeed, the two pieces of handkerchief came from the same one; the handkerchief was old, the white silk was now a pale yellow colour, but the embroidered red flowers were still as beautiful as before. He looked at the handkerchiefs and knew that there was something behind this. Why did the two of them each give half the handkerchief to me? Why did they want me to give it to Li Mochou? Why did they want to keep the fact they gave the handkerchief to me away from each other? Why

was it that when they handed the handkerchief over to me, their faces were filled with awkwardness and embarrassment?

He sat on the bed, thinking to himself in a trance. He heard the faraway faint calls of a cockerel followed by music from a flute, he knew that Cheng Ying had finished setting up the formation and was now playing the flute to comfort herself. She was playing the song 'Liu Bo' (Flowing Waves). The flute was soft and gentle, there was no sorrow within the music, and instead there was a soothing feeling, like the feeling of being carefree. Yang Guo listened for a little while and quietly followed along with it.

Lu Wushuang sat behind the pile of earth and listened to her cousin's flute and Yang Guo following along to it. Dawn was gradually approaching in the east. She thought, "My master will be here very shortly, my life won't be able to pass this hour. I hope that when master sees the handkerchief pieces, she will spare cousin and him, the two of them..."

Lu Wushuang had always been sharp and astute; her cousin had always given her some degree of leeway ever since they were kids. But in the face of danger, she truly hoped that Yang Guo would be able to avoid harm. She loved him in her heart and secretly wished that he would be able to escape, even if he married her cousin, she would have no regrets in death.

Just as she was thinking about this, she raised her head suddenly and saw a Taoist priestess dressed in apricot yellow standing outside the earth formation. Her right hand held a fly whisk, her gown fluttering in the wind; it was her master Li Mochou.

Lu Wushuang trembled. She picked up her sword and stood up. Li Mochou stood there without moving, just listening with her ears.

When she heard the flute and song, she recalled events of years ago when she was playing music along with Lu Zhanyuan. One played a flute, the other a panpipe, this song 'Liu Bo' was the song that they used to play.

This was twenty years ago; now the music was of old yet for her there was 'no secret exchange of the lover under the moon and wind'. When she heard the soft and tender tune of the flute and song, she felt pain and sorrow and eventually couldn't stop herself from crying.

Lu Wushuang could not have expected this sorrowful crying by her master; she had always known her to be a ruthless killer, where did this gentle and tender side come from? She has come here to kill, how come she's crying? But her cries were extremely sorrowful and somber; she couldn't stop her heart from suffering the sadness.

Yang Guo and Cheng Ying were startled when they heard the crying of Li Mochou and the song became disorganized.

Li Mochou had a thought and suddenly started to sing, her voice graceful and mournful, she sang:

"O mortals, what is love? That binds beyond life on earth?

To all corners, as pair we fly... braving summer and winter, by and by...

Union is bliss, parting is woe, agony is boundless, for a lovelorn soul, sweetheart...

Give me word, a trail of clouds drifting forward...

And mountains capped with snow, whither shall my lonesome shadow go?"

The flute was originally joyous, but Li Mochou's song was filled with sorrow, her tone mournful, it was completely different from the tune of 'Liu Bo'. The voice became quieter, but the quieter it got, the higher it got.

Cheng Ying was slightly disturbed, she actually began to follow the song from 'union is bliss' and by 'parting is woe', she could no longer stop herself from following her. She was alarmed and quickly changed the tune, but the music from a flute is peaceful and serene but her internal energy was shallow, she could not produce a high tune to subdue the song of Li Mochou. She stumbled slightly and headed into the hut. She placed the jade flute down and sat aside. She began to play the zither. Yang Guo also started to sing to help.

Li Mochou's song was becoming more and more mournful; Cheng Ying's strings were producing higher and higher notes, a 'zheng' sound was heard as the first 'zheng' string on the zither suddenly snapped.

Cheng Ying was startled and her fingers became slightly disorganized, the zither's second 'yu' string snapped. Li Mochou's prolonged song was filled with tears, the third 'gong' string also snapped. Huang Yaoshi taught Cheng Ying the flute and zither; though she learned from a great master she was still young, her abilities with them were not profound.

Li Mochou had originally wanted to take the chance, when the opponent was disturbed and distracted with the broken strings, to break straight through. But she thought that, although the earth formation outside the hut seemed to be in a mess, yet hidden within were the changes of the five elements. She didn't understand this particular art and she had suffered many times in the ancient tomb, there were some worries in her mind. She suddenly had an idea; she

wound around to the right and crashed through the wall in the midst of the music and song.

Cheng Ying's earth formation was placed to protect the front of the house and it slipped her mind that the sides of the house weren't guarded. Li Mochou slipped around the house and with her two palms crashed through the earth walls. Lu Wushuang was alarmed; she raised her sword and rushed into the house.

Yang Guo was injured and had no strength to stand up and fight, he could only lie there, not moving. Cheng Ying knew that if she fought Li Mochou she would lose her life in vain. She made a decision and forgot about life and death; she started to play the zither, a song of 'tao yao'. It was a beautiful tune, flowing with joy. In her heart she was thinking, "I have had a life of hardships, dieing here by brother Yang's side means at least my life hasn't been in vain." She looked towards Yang Guo. Yang Guo gave a subtle smile towards her, Cheng Ying was filled with joy and bliss, she sang:

*"The beauty of the blossom burns brightly,
The zither flows the ocean spray,
The music carries the fragrance of flowers, the
soothing spring breeze."*

The bitterness on Li Mochou's face gradually disappeared, she asked Lu Wushuang, "Where's the book? Was it the Beggar Clan who took it?"

Yang Guo took out the 'Five Poison Codex' and threw it over to her. He said, "The Beggar Clan's Chief Huang and Chief Lu are righteous and virtuous people, what do they want with this evil book? They long ago passed down an order to Beggar Clan members to not to open even one page of this book."

Li Mochou saw that this book was in its original condition; she knew the Beggar Clan was a righteous clan and had strict regulations; most probably they did not take a look at her book.

Yang Guo also took out the two half pieces of handkerchief from his pockets and placed it down on the end of the bed and said, "Take these handkerchiefs away!"

Li Mochou's face changed completely, she waved her fly whisk and wrapped it around the handkerchiefs bringing them towards her. She held them in her hand, startled, her thoughts stirred, and her state of mind unstable.

Lu Wushuang and Cheng Ying looked at each other and both were red faced; they didn't guess that the other would give a handkerchief half to Yang Guo, who now had brought them out into the open.

As one looked at the other, their hearts were filled with many thoughts and their eyes glistened. The air of death that was in the hut had now changed into an air of love. Cheng Ying's song 'Tao Yao' was played with even more happiness.

Suddenly, Li Mochou tore the handkerchief in four and said, "The past is the past, why is there a need to return there?" Her hands ripped urgently for a while and then flung the pieces into the air; the pieces of the torn handkerchief fell like descending petals.

Cheng Ying was startled and after a 'zheng' sound, another string of the zither snapped.

Li Mochou angrily shouted, "Break another string!"

In the midst of the mournful song, the fifth 'gen' string did indeed snap. Li Mochou chuckled and said, "Now I'm going

to make you suffer, you won't be able to beg for your life nor death, quickly wail for me."

The zither had two strings remaining, Cheng Ying's abilities with a zither were ordinary and it was difficult for her to form a tune.

Li Mochou said, "Quickly play mournful notes! There is too much suffering in the world, what joy is there in living?"

Cheng Ying played two notes, although it didn't form a tune, it was still following the music of the 'Tao Yao'.

Li Mochou said, "Fine, I'll first kill one of you, will you be mournful then?"

That severely toned shout caused another string of the zither to snap, she raised her fly whisk, about to strike down on Lu Wushuang's head.

Yang Guo smiled and said, "The three of us dying together today is a much happier experience than you will have living alone in the world. Sister Ying, Sister Shuang, come over here." Lu Wushuang and Cheng Ying went over to the bed. Yang Guo's right hand held Lu Wushuang, his left held Cheng Ying, he smiled and said, "The three of us dying together will allow us to chat and joke on the Huang Guan path (road to underworld), isn't that ten times better than being that evil woman?"

Lu Wushuang smiled and said, "Yes, good Sha Dan, you're right." Cheng Ying gave a warm smile. The two cousins were both enchanted as Yang Guo held onto their hands.

Yet Yang Guo was thinking, "It's a pity that it isn't Gu Gu who is by my side." But he forced a joyful smile, he lightly pulled the two closer against his body.

Li Mochou thought, "He's right, those three dying like this is better than living like me." She pondered, "How can you have things that are to your advantage on this earth? I'll make sure that you're filled with sorrow and grief before you die." So she lightly swung her fly whisk and with a face resembling bitter frost, she started to quietly sing. She was singing the 'O mortals, what is love? That binds beyond life on earth?' song; the song and tone was filled with sorrow and grief, like an abandoned woman crying, like a night ghost wailing.

The three of them held hands together as they listened, after a while, they couldn't stop themselves from feeling hurt in their hearts. Yang Guo's internal energy was relatively profound and wasn't moved, his face still carried a subtle smile; Lu Wushuang was strong, she would not be easily moved; Cheng Ying however could endure no longer and tears flowed. The longer Li Mochou sang, the quieter it became, eventually, it was as if there was no song.

As soon as the three cried, the Scarlet Serpent Deity will wave out her fly whisk and kill them all. Just as soon as the song was becoming extremely sad and depressing, someone from outside the hut suddenly laughed out loud and clapped as they made their way towards the hut.

It was a woman's voice, it appeared that the voice was not young but what she was singing was a naïve and innocent song: "Sway, sway, sway, sway until granny's bridge falls, granny calls me my precious, sweets in one bag, fruit in the other, once I've finished I'll take another."

The song was filled with joy and happiness, Li Mochou's sadness and the sorrow in her song was disturbed. The song was getting closer and closer. After a while someone entered the hut from the front door, it was a middle-aged woman with disheveled hair and clothes, her eyes round

and wide open, she laughed foolishly and her hand held a fire fork (fireplace fork).

Li Mochou was startled, "How did she get past those piles of earth and enter through the main door so easily? If she isn't with them then she must be versed in art of formations and changes." As she concentrated on this, the power of her song immediately decreased.

When Cheng Ying saw this woman she was delighted and called out, "Senior Apprentice Sister, that woman wants to hurt me, help me."

That disheveled hair woman was Sha Gu. She was actually a generation lower than Cheng Ying but she was a lot older, that's the reason why Cheng Ying called her senior apprentice sister.

Sha Gu clapped her hands and laughed, she started to sing some songs at the top of her voice, she would sing songs like 'Sparkling star in the sky, nothing on the ground my oh my', 'Precious Pagoda tip, surging up, the sky it rips'. Sometimes she would remember the wrong lyrics and replace them with whatever she thought of.

Li Mochou wanted to use the sorrowful and mournful song to subdue her but how would she know that it wouldn't affect her. Love comes from the heart, but since her heart was full of confusion and disorder, even if the outside influence was stronger there will be no way to create and stir up these feelings. Instead, Sha Gu's muddled up songs disturbed Li Mochou's sorrowful tones, it ended her control over Yang Guo and the others.

Li Mochou was furious and thought, "I need to get rid of this person first." Before the song finished, she waved her fly whisk and attacked her head.

Years ago, Huang Yaoshi punished his innocent disciples out of anger and as a result caused his disciple Qu Lingfeng to die at the hands of his enemies. He regretted this and so took in Qu Lingfeng's daughter Sha Gu under his care and decided to teach everything he knew to her. However, when Sha Gu saw her father being harmed, she suffered a severe shock and it remained in her mind, no matter how many times Huang Yaoshi tried to make her better. A man cannot turn time back, without mentioning the futility of trying to teach her all the arts and martial arts he knew. Even trying to get her to recognize a few words and learn a few coarse martial arts was something that he couldn't do. But over the last ten years, under the instruction of a great master, Sha Gu had learned a set of palm techniques and a fork technique. It's called a set but really there were only three stances of palm and fork techniques.

Huang Yaoshi knew she would not remember any sort of variations or extraordinary stances so he thought deeply and came up with three palm stances and three fork stances. Those six stances were ordinary and didn't have any variation behind them; the power of these techniques all comes from practice. When normal people practice martial arts, a little practice will lead to only tens of stances being learned, a lot will lead to variations surpassing a thousand. Sha Gu only practiced the six stances so as time went by, naturally these stances will be refined and precise; though there are few stances, it was not anything ordinary.

As to how she went through the formation, it was because she had lived on Peach Blossom Island for a long time, the formation that Cheng Ying had set up was a coarse and basic skill of Peach Blossom Island. Sha Gu didn't even need to take a look and just naturally followed her steps forward to the hut.

Now, she saw Li Mochou's fly whisk coming towards her; she thrust out the fork towards her chest. Li Mochou heard that the sound of air being sliced through and was furious, she couldn't stop herself from being alarmed, "Hard to predict that this woman possesses such profound internal strength." She quickly stepped to the left and sent the fly whisk towards her head. Sha Gu didn't care what the opponent's stance was and just thrust her fork forward. Li Mochou's fly whisk twisted and wrapped around the head of the fork. It was as if Sha Gu didn't see what had happened, the fork kept on going forward. Li Mochou circulated her internal energy to fling the weapon away but the fire fork didn't move an inch, in a flash it was now in between her breasts. Li Mochou's martial arts were high and she managed to use "Steps of the Turning Seven Stars" in this danger, and leapt out of the hole in the wall, avoiding this lightning like attack but, because of the fright, she broke out in a cold sweat.

She concentrated and leapt back into the hut and attacked with her fly whisk in midair. Sha Gu didn't change her stance with the enemy's and just thrust forwards again but because the enemy was in the air, the fork was now aiming for her opponent's abdomen.

Li Mochou saw the incoming attack was fast and powerful; she turned her fly whisk around and used the handle to block the attack and used its force to dart away. She looked at her stunned, thinking, "Just know, my three attacks contained nine different variations and twelve different follow ups; a skilled fighter of Wulin would not be able to see through them just like that. This woman just uses one fork and neutralized my sixty-three variations in these stances. This person's martial arts are excellent, I'd better leave!"

She didn't know that Sha Gu's fork technique only had three stances; if Li Mochou fought for a little while longer she would be able to see through her martial arts and win easily. Sha Gu had three fork stances, just by using one fork stance she scared away an extremely powerful enemy, the master of Peach Blossom Island should be very proud.

Li Mochou turned around and was about to leap out of the hut through the hole in the wall when she saw someone sitting down by the hole. The person was in a blue green gown and had a long beard; it was the person who saved Cheng Ying from her clutches all those years ago, Huang Yaoshi. Island Master Huang. He was sitting down and had placed Cheng Ying's zither on a stool.

When Li Mochou was in battle, her eyes and ears were extremely alert; how had Huang Yaoshi entered, how had he taken the zither and when had he sat down on the floor? She failed to notice all those things; if he had ambushed her from behind, wouldn't taking her life be as easy as turning his palm?

When Li Mochou was exchanging stances with Sha Gu, she was worried about Cheng Ying and the others joining in to help so she did not stop her song, keeping their state of mind unbalanced. As she saw Huang Yaoshi sitting there quietly strumming the zither, she trembled and her song stopped.

Huang Yaoshi played one note on the zither and sang; "O mortals, what is love? That binds beyond life on earth?" He sang Li Mochou's song. The zither only had the 'yu' string remaining but he still managed to play the notes of the 'gong', 'shang', 'jiao', 'zheng' and 'yu'. With the mournful tone of the zither, Huang Yaoshi overwhelmed Li Mochou's song.

Li Mochou was extremely familiar with this song; as soon as Huang Yaoshi added the tune, she was affected ten times deeper than when Yang Guo and the others were affected by her song. Huang Yaoshi had known long ago about her evil ways, today he wanted to take the opportunity to get rid of her.

Years ago he had used his jade flute to compete against Ouyang Feng's iron zither and Hong Qi Gong's whistling and fought to a draw. That was many years ago; because of his age, his vigor wasn't what it used to be but his internal energy became more and more profound as he practiced. How could Li Mochou resist? In just a short while she felt her mind slipping out of her control.

Huang Yaoshi's song and tune would suddenly turn joyous, then anger, resounding and overbearing, then suddenly lowly and humble, many changes in the wink of an eye. He was forcing Li Mochou to suddenly feel delight and then sorrow, suddenly anger then worry; when this song finishes, Li Mochou would have been forced to go mad.

Just at this time, Sha Gu turned her head around and suddenly saw Yang Guo, under the candlelight; he was an image of his father Yang Kang. The thing that Sha Gu is most afraid of are ghosts; the images of what had happened when Yang Kang died due to poison were deeply etched into her mind. She would never forget it. When she saw Yang Guo sitting there, she knew that it was Yang Kang's ghost coming back to haunt her. She quickly leapt up and pointed to him, saying, "Brother... brother Yang, don't... don't hurt me... it... it wasn't me who killed you... go... go and find someone else."

Huang Yaoshi wasn't prepared for her disturbance and a 'zheng' sound was heard as the final string on the zither snapped.

Sha Gu hid behind him and called out, "Ghost... ghost... grandpa, it's brother Yang's ghost."

With this pause, Li Mochou quickly used her fly whisk and extinguished all the candles in the room and leapt out through the hole in the wall.

Huang Yaoshi had yet to take her life and eventually she managed to escape; he had to uphold his status and so he could not go and chase after her.

Sha Gu was even more afraid in the dark and called out even louder, "It's an evil ghost, grandpa, beat that ghost, beat that ghost!"

Huang Yaoshi kept Sha Gu in check. Cheng Ying lit the candles and then knelt on the floor and bowed to her master. She stood up and then told him the simple background of Yang Guo and Lu Wushuang.

Huang Yaoshi laughed and said, "My martial grand daughter has always been simple like this. She knew your father. You indeed do look a lot like him."

Yang Guo bent his waist and bowed to him from the bed and said, "Forgive junior, I have an injury and cannot bow properly."

Huang Yaoshi's face was very friendly and said, "You didn't give a care about your life and saved my daughter and granddaughter, you really are a good child." Huang Yaoshi had seen Huang Rong and knew what had happened, he heard that Cheng Ying had rescued him so he took Sha Gu with him and searched for them.

Huang Yaoshi took out some effective recuperative medicine and gave it to Yang Guo to take. He then circulated his internal energy and passed it into Yang Guo

through his palm to help him recover. Yang Guo felt as if his arms were on fire, his body started to create a force to repel this. Huang Yaoshi felt him tremble and noticed that his veins and chi were circulating, there was a resisting internal energy that was being created so he increased the strength in his hands. After a while, Yang Guo felt his limbs and bones were at ease and soothed, and gradually he fell into a deep sleep.

When Yang Guo woke up the next day, he opened his eyes and saw Huang Yaoshi sitting at the end of the bed. He quickly sat up and greeted him.

Huang Yaoshi said, "Do you know what title I go by in Jianghu?"

Yang Guo said, "Senior is Island Master Huang?"

Huang Yaoshi said, "And?"

Yang Guo felt that it was inappropriate to say the words 'Eastern Heretic' but he had a thought, since his nickname is 'Eastern Heretic', his character will be different to normal people so he boldly said, "You are the 'Eastern Heretic'!"

Huang Yaoshi laughed and said, "Correct. I've heard that your martial arts are not bad, your heart is good but you do things in heretical ways. I also heard that you want to marry your Master, is that right?"

Yang Guo said, "Correct, senior, no one will allow me to do this, but even if I'll die I still want to marry her."

Those words were like a nail striking metal; Huang Yaoshi stared at him for a while and then suddenly raised his head and laughed towards the sky, shaking the grass on the roof.

Yang Guo said angrily, "What's so funny about that? I thought that because you are called 'Eastern Heretic', you would have some extraordinary opinion, but who would have thought that you are just like the others."

Huang Yaoshi loudly said, "Good, good, good!" After he said this, he turned around and left.

Yang Guo sat on the bed startled, he thought, "My words really offended that senior. But how come he didn't show any signs of anger on his face?"

He didn't know that as Huang Yaoshi roamed the world and the one thing he hated most were the present custom and traditions of the world. His actions and words did not match with the normal and because of this he was given the name 'Heretic'. He had met many people, but in his life, he did not have an understanding friend. Though he had a daughter and son-in-law as loved ones, they did not understand him. He didn't know that in his later years he would come upon Yang Guo.

The events of the heroes meet had already spread to his ears and Huang Rong told him about this young man's actions and behavior. After speaking to him a few times he found that Yang Guo matched his expectations even more.

That night, Huang Yaoshi returned to the room and said, "Yang Guo, I heard you expelled yourself from the Quanzhen sect and beat up your Master, you are rather heretical. Why don't you leave the Ancient Tomb sect, and then enter my tutelage."

Yang Guo was startled and said, "Why?"

Huang Yaoshi laughed and said, "First you'll acknowledge that Xiao Longnu is not your Master and then marry her, won't that be proper?"

Yang Guo said, "That's a good idea. But who set the rule that you can't marry your Master? I want her to be my Master and my wife."

Huang Yaoshi clapped and laughed, he said, "Good! The way you think is a level higher than me." He stretched out his hand to help him recuperate through his palms and said, "I originally wanted you to enter my tutelage so I could let the world know that after Senior Heretic Huang, there's a young Heretic Yang. You don't want to be my disciple; I can't do anything about that."

Yang Guo said, "I don't have to be your disciple to spread your 'Heretic' name. If you don't mind me being of a young age and have poor martial arts, we could be friends or else we could become brothers."

Huang Yaoshi angrily said, "You sure are bold for a little kid. I'm not the Old Urchin Zhou Botong, how can there be no order between us?"

Yang Guo said, "Who's the Old Urchin Zhou Botong?"

Huang Yaoshi then told him a few things about Zhou Botong's character and how he became sworn brothers with Guo Jing.

The two of them chatted and hit it off perfectly, there's a saying: 'A thousand cups is too little for understanding friends who meet through wine, half a word is too much for those whose words don't get along'.

Yang Guo was good with words and they got along because of the closeness of his character to Huang Yaoshi's. Whenever he spoke, Huang Yaoshi would sigh as someone who understood him. For Huang Yaoshi, it really was like the first meeting of an old friend, a meeting that has come extremely late in life. Though he didn't admit it through his

words, in his heart he treated him as a friend of old. That night he told Cheng Ying to prepare another bed for him in the same room and the two continued their exchange.

Days passed and Yang Guo recovered from his injury. He and Huang Yaoshi were like glue, like paint, it was difficult to separate the two. Huang Yaoshi had originally wanted to take Sha Gu south but now he didn't mention one word about leaving. Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang watched the old and young with amusement; in the day they would drink wine together and at night, they would talk in the candlelight without end. They felt that the old man didn't maintain the status of a Senior and the young man was too unrestrained and fearless.

When it came to discussions of knowledge, Yang Guo wasn't anywhere as knowledgeable as Huang Yaoshi. But whatever Huang Yaoshi said, Yang Guo would concentrate on understanding. When he made a comment he would just add a single word yet his comment had its fine points. Huang Yaoshi couldn't stop himself from treating him as the closest friend in his life.

In these past few days, apart from spending time with Huang Yaoshi talking, he would always think about how Sha Gu mistakenly recognized him as his father and the words that she said, "It wasn't me who killed you, go and find someone else!" He knew that Sha Gu must know who had killed his father; other people might not say, but Sha Gu is mad and crazy and maybe he could get the truth from her.

After midday, Yang Guo said, "Sha Gu, come, I have something to say to you."

Sha Gu felt that he looked too much like Yang Kang and was still afraid; she shook her head and said, "I don't want to play with you."

Yang Guo said, "I know circus tricks, are you going to watch?"

Sha Gu shook her head and said, "You're lying, I don't want to watch." She closed her eyes after she said this. Yang Guo suddenly flipped upside down with his legs above his head and called out, "Quickly look!" He used the martial arts that Ouyang Feng taught him of walking upside down and leaping forward. Sha Gu opened her eyes and was delighted as soon as she saw this, she clapped and cheered and followed behind him.

Yang Guo kept on leaping forward and arrived at a hidden and covered wood faraway from the hut, he turned upright and said, "Let's play hide and seek, you want to? But the loser has to be punished."

Sha Gu has been following Huang Yaoshi for the past few years; nobody played with her. When she heard Yang Guo say this, she was ecstatic and clapped her hands, most of the fear she had for him disappeared and she said, "Yes, yes. Good brother, what is the punishment?" She called his father brother, and she also called him brother.

Yang Guo took out a handkerchief and blindfolded her and said, "Come and catch me. If you catch me, then whatever question you ask I'll have to answer it truthfully. If you can't catch me then I get to ask you a question, you have to answer it truthfully as well."

Sha Gu replied, "Good, good!"

Yang Guo called out, "I'm over here, come and catch me!"

Sha Gu opened her arms and followed the calls. Yang Guo possessed the lightness kung fu of the Ancient Tomb sect, even if Sha Gu wasn't blindfolded she would not be able to catch him, after chasing for a while, she crashed into a tree

and bruised her forehead as a result; she started to cry out in pain.

Yang Guo was afraid that Sha Gu would not want to play anymore so he deliberately slowed down and made light noise. Sha Gu rushed forward and grabbed his back and called out, "I've caught you, I've caught you!" Her face was full of delight as she took off her blindfold.

Yang Guo said, "Fine, I've lost, ask me ask a question."

She stared at him, startled, her mind was uncertain; she didn't know what to ask. After a long while, she asked, "Good brother, have you eaten yet?"

She thought for so long but came up with such a simple question, Yang Guo almost laughed. He didn't make a sound and seriously replied, "I've eaten already."

Sha Gu nodded and didn't say anything else.

Yang Guo said, "What else do you want to ask?"

Sha Gu shook her head and said, "I don't want to ask anymore, let's play again."

Yang Guo said, "Fine, come and catch me."

Sha Gu touched the bruise on her forehead and said, "This time it's your turn to catch me." This time, she didn't act crazy, Yang Guo didn't predict this but since this was what he wanted he took the handkerchief and blindfolded himself. Though Sha Gu was mad, her lightness kung fu was pretty good; Yang Guo couldn't see, how could he catch her? He leapt forward a few times and then secretly he tore an opening in the blindfold and saw her hiding on the right behind a large tree. He deliberately faced the left, pretending to think, he said, "Where are you? Where are you?" He suddenly flipped over and caught her wrist. He

quickly put the handkerchief in his pockets with his left hand in case she saw the ripped handkerchief. He laughed and said, "This time it's my turn to ask you a question."

Sha Gu said, "I've eaten already."

Yang Guo laughed and said, "I'm not asking about that. This is my question, you know my father, right?" His face was extremely serious as he said this.

Sha Gu said, "Who's your father?"

Yang Guo said, "There's a person who looks just like me, who is that?"

Sha Gu said, "Ah, that's brother Yang."

Yang Guo asked, "You saw that brother Yang being killed by someone didn't you?"

Sha Gu said, "Yeah, it was in the middle of the night in a temple, there were lots of crows calling out 'wu ai', 'wu ai', 'wu ai'!" The forest was covered and hidden and was already dark; the calls made the forest seem even more eerie.

Yang Guo trembled and asked, "How did brother Yang die?"

Sha Gu said, "Auntie wanted me to say something but brother Yang didn't allow me to say it; he struck Auntie with a palm and laughed out loud, ha-ha! Ha-ha! Ha-ha!" She used all her efforts in copying Yang Kang's laugh before he died, her laugh even scared herself and her face was filled with fear.

Yang Guo listened puzzled, he asked, "Who is Auntie?"

Sha Gu said, "Auntie is Auntie."

Yang Guo knew that the puzzle to his father's death was about to be solved, he was full of emotions and was about to ask another question when suddenly someone from behind said, "What are you two playing here?" It was Huang Yaoshi's voice.

Sha Gu said, "Good brother is playing hide and seek with me. It was he who wanted me to play, not me wanting him to play. Don't scold me."

Huang Yaoshi smiled a little and then looked at Yang Guo, he looked as if he has seen through what Yang Guo was thinking about.

Yang Guo's heart raced, he was about to say a few words to cover it up. Suddenly, footsteps could be heard from outside the forest, Cheng Ying was holding Lu Wushuang as they hurried towards them and she said to Huang Yaoshi, "Master is right, she is still around." She then pointed to the hill in the west.

Yang Guo asked, "Who?"

Cheng Ying said, "Li Mochou!"

Yang Guo was extremely shocked; he was thinking why on earth was she so bold, he looked at Huang Yaoshi, hoping that he will be able to explain.

Huang Yaoshi gave laugh and said, "Let's go over there and take a look." None of them had any fear with him around, so they headed towards that hill in the west.

Cheng Ying knew that Yang Guo had questions in his heart and quietly said, "Master said that Li Mochou knows that he has the status of a great Master. That night he wanted to take her life but he was unable to at the first attempt, a second attempt on her life would be shameful."

Yang Guo understood. Alarmed he said, "Because of this she could guard this place confidently and wait for the chance to take our lives. If Island Master Huang hadn't seen through this, we would have thought that she had long gone and let our guard down and eventually suffered by her hands."

Cheng Ying smiled warmly and nodded. Lu Wushuang interrupted, "You think you are cleverer than most people; but compared with Island Master Huang, there's a long way to go."

Yang Guo laughed and said, "I'm Sha Dan, I'm dumber than most people; I'm Sha Gu's good brother."

The five of them soon arrived on the hill. There was a small hut beside a large tree, it was broken and dilapidated; there was a piece of paper nailed onto the door. On it were four lines:

The master of Peach Blossom Island,
Disciples he has many,
Five against one,
It's the laughing stock of Jianghu!

Huang Yaoshi laughed and casually picked up two pebbles and placed them in between his middle finger and thumb, after a 'chi' 'chi' sound, the pebbles shot forward forcefully. A 'pai' sound was heard as the two small pebbles, from over ten paces away, knocked the doors open.

When Yang Guo was on Peach Blossom Island, he heard from Guo Fu that her grandfather had a skill called the "Divine Flicking Finger"; today, he saw it with his own eyes and it far exceeded the tales about it; he was in awe.

Once the doors opened, they saw Li Mochou sitting on a mat on the floor, her hands holding her fly whisk, her eyes

closed; she looked collected and was meditating just like a Taoist. She was in the hut by herself; Hong Lingbo was nowhere to be seen. A thought went through Yang Guo's mind and he understood, "She's laughing at Island Master Huang for having many disciples and winning through numbers, that's why she sent Hong Lingbo away to make it even more apparent. She's confident not because she can defend against Island Master Huang, it's because since she's by herself. With Island Master Huang's status, it would not be appropriate to attack her."

The memories of her parents' death and the torment she's had through the years stirred in Lu Wushuang; she suddenly drew out her sword and called out, "Cousin, Sha Dan, we don't have the same restraints as Island Master Huang about fighting her, let's all attack her."

Sha Gu rubbed her knuckles and palms and said, "And me!"

Li Mochou opened her eyes and glanced across at the five; a look of contempt was on her face and she closed her eyes again; it was as if she was ignoring the enemies in front of her. Cheng Ying looked at her master, waiting for his orders.

Huang Yaoshi sighed and said, "Indeed, old Heretic Huang has many disciples, if any of my four senior disciples Qu, Chen, Mei, Lu were here, how would she be allowed to say a word?" He then waved his hand and said, "Let's leave."

The four of them did not understand what he was thinking and followed him back to the hut. They saw that he was unhappy; he went to bed and didn't even eat supper.

Yang Guo slept on the bed next to his and recalled the things he said with Sha Gu; he then pondered about Li Mochou, and he thought, "She's laughing at us because it's five against one. I've recovered from my injury now, with my

strength alone I might not lose to her; why don't I sneak away and fight a round with her. This way I can clear her insults about me and Gu Gu and help Island Master Huang vent his anger."

He made his decision and dressed himself quietly. Though he was impulsive, he did things rather carefully; he knew Li Mochou was a very strong foe, if he made just one wrong move he would die by her hands. So he sat on his bed circulating his chi and prepared himself, once he was at his peak, he would go and fight the duel to the death.

He had sat there for around an hour when suddenly his eyes lit up, chi was everywhere in his body and he couldn't stop himself from calling out. The call was like the roar of a dragon, like a tiger bellowing in a deep valley, the sound spreading far and wide.

Huang Yaoshi had noticed that he was awake when he had got up to dress himself; when he heard this extraordinary call, he was shocked and delighted. He hadn't predicted that Yang Guo's internal energy would make a break through right at this time.

When someone's internal energy reaches a certain stage, they would unconsciously call out.

Later on in the Ming Dynasty, the Da Ru King Yang Ming was practicing his chi in the middle in the night in his encampment when he suddenly made a prolonged call, shocking his entire camp.

Yang Guo's chi was abundant and it was hard for him to control, the bellow spread for many li.

Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang were extremely startled; even Li Mochou was frightened when she heard it. But she thought that it was Huang Yaoshi who was exercising his

chi, there was no need to be afraid since he wasn't going to do anything.

Yang Guo had the help of the 'Chilled Jade Bed' and had practiced the important aspects of the "Jade Heart Manual" and "Nine Yin Manual"; his accumulated internal energy had become profound. A few days before, Huang Yaoshi had helped him to recuperate, but Island Master Huang's internal energy was of a different nature to his. It was provoked by this extremely profound internal energy, now he couldn't control himself and released a long bellow.

The bellow continued for a while before gradually it quieted and then stilled.

Huang Yaoshi thought, "I have always thought that my talents were not of this earth, yet I had to wait until I was thirty before reaching such a stage. This young man has reached this stage at least ten years before me; I wonder what events he has encountered?" He waited for Yang Guo to finish and stand up before asking, "Tell me, what do you think is Li Mochou's most powerful skill?"

When Yang Guo heard this, he knew that his intentions had been seen through and replied, "It is the "Divine Five Poison Palm" and her fly whisk techniques."

Huang Yaoshi said, "Correct, since your internal energy has some foundation it shouldn't be difficult to neutralize her most proficient skill." Yang Guo was delighted and bowed down to him. Yang Guo was very proud; though he recognized Huang Yaoshi was a senior and his abilities were superb, he wouldn't lower his head to him. Now that he heard that the martial arts Li Mochou used to roam the realm could be neutralized, how could he not be in awe?"

Huang Yaoshi then taught him the skill of the "Divine Flicking Finger" to neutralize Li Mochou's "Divine Five

Poison Palms” and a sword technique derived from his “Jade Flute Swordplay” to neutralize the fly whisk techniques.

Yang Guo listened to him point out the important aspects of these techniques and then asked him to explain some of the difficulties; he concentrated and committed them to memory. But he felt that although these two types of martial arts are profound and masterly, to make some progress, one will need to practice for at least a year. If he wanted to reach a stage where he would be able to beat her, it would take three years and no less. He said, “Island Master Huang, there is no way to beat her right now.”

Huang Yaoshi said, “Three years will pass in the blink of an eye. Then you’ll be twenty one or twenty two years of age, and will have learned these two types of martial arts. Isn’t that enough?”

Yang Guo said, “I’m... I’m not doing it for me...”

Huang Yaoshi patted his shoulder and said warmly, “When you kill her for me three years from now, I will be extremely touched. Years ago I destroyed my disciples, shouldn’t I get some kind of payback today?” He gave a long sigh after he said this.

Yang Guo knelt down and kowtowed eight times to him and then called out, “Master!” He knew that Huang Yaoshi had passed on martial arts to him so that he will be able to cleanse the four lines of Li Mochou’s insult. To do this, they will have to be recognized as master and disciple. But Huang Yaoshi knew that his ties with the Ancient Tomb were extremely deep, he would be unwillingly to accept another master so he helped him up and said, “When you fight that witch, you are my disciple, at all other times, you are my friend. Little brother Yang, do you understand?”

Yang Guo laughed and said, "To be able to make a friend like you really is a glorious event."

Huang Yaoshi said, "The two of us meeting is the luck of three generations." The two of them laughed, their sounds moving the four walls.

Huang Yaoshi once again explained in detail the secrets and ideas of the "Divine Flicking Finger" and the "Jade Flute Swordplay" to him. Yang Guo noted that he was explaining them thoroughly and knew that he was about to leave.

He said gloomily, "We've just met and now we are about to part; when will we be able to meet again?"

Huang Yaoshi laughed and said, "The two of us are linked; even if we are at the opposite ends of the world, we'll still be like neighbors. If in the future I find out that someone is blocking your marriage, even if I'm ten thousand li away, I will rush back and help you."

Yang Guo was comforted by this promise and laughed, "I'm afraid that the first person who will come out and stop this marriage will be your loved one."

Huang Yaoshi said, "She marries her ideal man and forgets about the suffering and bitterness of others? My precious daughter only listens to her husband, ha-ha, 'obey the husband when married', that really is something!" He laughed loudly after he said this and turned around and left the room, in a flash his laughter could be heard tens of feet away, he really moved like a divine dragon leaving no trace.

Yang Guo stood there for a while stunned and then sat down and went over the two martial arts that he had just learned. Not long after, the sky became bright. He saw the door open, Cheng Ying had entered with blue green cloth

and a blue green gown in her hands; she gave a little smile and said, "Try this on, see whether it fits you."

Yang Guo was extremely touched; his hands trembled slightly as he received it.

Their eyes met and he saw that Cheng Ying's eyes were full of love and boundless tenderness. He went over to the side of the bed and tried the new gown. He felt that the gown fitted perfectly and said, "I'm... I'm... I'm really grateful."

Cheng Ying showed another smile but immediately a depressed expression was on her face, she sighed and said, "Master has gone, I don't know when I'll be able to see him again." She was about to sit down and say something when she saw a yellow image at the door that immediately disappeared. She knew it was her cousin outside and thought, "That girl has too many thoughts, it's not appropriate for me to stay in his room for too long." She stood up and slowly walked out.

He carefully studied the gown and noticed that the stitching was careful and tight, he thought, "She and Wifey treat me the same but my heart belongs to someone else, I can't love any others. If I don't leave soon, I'll be giving those two a lot of grief." He thought about this for half a day. He was also afraid that when he leaves, Li Mochou would come and attack them. He went to her hut to take a look and saw that in its place was a pile of ash, Li Mochou had burned the hut and left.

The enemy had left and so that night, he wrote a parting letter by candlelight; he thought about the two girls' love and felt depressed. He saw that his letter wasn't worded with great aptitude and his handwriting was poor; he was afraid that Cheng Ying would laugh and so ripped the letter

up. That night he tossed and turned in his bed as he tried to sleep.

In his blurry state, he suddenly heard Lu Wushuang tapping his door and calling out, "Sha Dan, Sha Dan! Quickly come and take a look." Her voice sounded rather anxious and afraid.

Yang Guo got up, dressed himself, and opened the door; he felt a slightly chilly breeze and the sky wasn't bright yet.

Lu Wushuang's face was filled with fear and pointed at the outside of the door. Yang Guo followed her hand and was shocked; there were four blood red handprints on the door. Li Mochou must have come over to survey the group and found that Huang Yaoshi had left; the four prints were left to tell them that she was going to kill the four of them.

Cheng Ying came out after them and asked, "When did you see this?"

Lu Wushuang said, "Before the sky started to get bright." Once she said this, her face went red. She was longing for Yang Guo and had paced back and forth below his window.

Cheng Ying pretended that she didn't know and said, "Luckily you didn't bump into her. The sun has begun to rise, that witch won't come again today. We've still got time to plan." The three of them returned to Yang Guo's room and discussed what to do about the situation.

Lu Wushuang said, "She had a taste of Sha Gu's kung fu the other day, how come she's not afraid of her?"

Cheng Ying said, "Apprentice sister's fork technique only has a few stances. She went away and thought about it carefully and must have come up with a way to neutralize it."

Lu Wushuang said, "However, Sha Dan has recovered from his injury; with the two Sha people together, won't their power be great?"

Yang Guo laughed and said, "With Sha Dan plus a Sha Gu, you've got dumb and dumber, what power?"

The three of them continued their discussion for a while but couldn't come up with any great plan. They thought about the four of them fighting together; they won't be able to beat her but could protect themselves. They decided on fighting her with all their might when she came again the next day.

Yang Guo said, "The two Sha people will join up and fight her from the front, you two attack from the sides. Let's go find Sha Gu and practice our plan."

The three of them called for Sha Gu but there was no reply. They didn't know where she was and the three of them began to worry. The three of them split up to search for her.

Cheng Ying searched for a little while and suddenly saw Sha Gu lying on a pile of rocks, her breathing was weak. Cheng Ying was alarmed and quickly took off her clothes to take a look; she saw that there was a red palm print on her back; she had fallen victim to Li Mochou's "Divine Five Poison Palm". Cheng Ying quickly called for Yang Guo and Lu Wushuang and then fed a 'Nine Flower Jade Dew' pill to her.

Yang Guo remembered the method to cure this palm from the 'Five Poison Codex' and quickly circulated his internal energy and controlled her pressure points.

Sha Gu laughed foolishly and said, "Evil woman, behind, hit me. Sha Gu, hit back, hit her." The counterattack that Sha Gu used was one of the three palms techniques that Huang

Yaoshi taught her. Though Li Mochou succeeded in her ambush, she was struck on the arm and her arm was almost broken; she was frightened and in pain so she left swiftly, not daring to continue her stances and take Sha Gu's life.

The three took Sha Gu back to the hut and sat anxiously; with one of the good fighters hurt, in tomorrow's battle it would be even harder to defend against her. Sha Gu had a serious injury; if they escaped with her in tow, they would definitely be caught by Li Mochou.

Yang Guo looked at Cheng Ying and then at Lu Wushuang. Then he then picked up a piece of string from the needle basket that was at hand and then grabbed a pair of scissors and started to cut.

Sha Gu was lying on the bed and suddenly called out "Cut it; cut that evil woman's broom! Cut that broom!" She didn't know it was called a 'fly whisk' and called it a 'broom'.

Yang Guo had an idea, "That witch's fly whisk is a soft weapon and she uses it superbly; precious sabers and sharp swords can't harm her. If there really was a large pair of scissors that could be used as a weapon and cut her fly whisk, that would be great." As he thought about this, the string in his left hand started to move like a fly whisk, the scissors in his right hand came forward and cut the string in two. He then pondered about the fly whisk's movements and how to control the scissors to attack; dreaming up a set of techniques.

Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang watched for a while and then understood, delight was on their faces.

Cheng Ying said, "There's a blacksmith seven or eight li north of here..."

Lu Wushuang interrupted and said, "Good, we'll go and get that blacksmith to forge a large pair of scissors."

Yang Guo thought, "It would be difficult to forge this weapon in such a rush and I'll have to adjust to the change of battle. This is a lot easier than learning the "Jade Flute Swordplay", and anyway, we don't have another plan so we've got to give it a try."

If one of them leaves and takes the order to the blacksmith, it will be extremely dangerous if Li Mochou were to suddenly ambush that person. Right now the four of them could not be separated. So Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang set up some bedding on the horse and placed Sha Gu on the back of the horse. They made their way to the blacksmith.

After the Mongols conquered the Jin, they entered the boundaries of the Song land. This place was the northern frontier of the Song borders, the Mongols had ransacked cities and towns and the whole place was in ruins.

The blacksmith shop was very simple; in the middle was a large anvil, on the floor were pieces of coal and fragments of metals and there were a few plows and sickles hung on the wall. There was no one in the shop.

Yang Guo looked at the shop and thought, "How can weapons be made here!" But since they've made their way here, he might as well ask so he called out loudly, "Is the blacksmith home?"

After a while, an old man entered from a side room; his beard and hair was grey, he was about fifty years old. The man had a hump, most probably from bending down to forge metal over a long time; his eyes were red and small because of smoke from the fires. His left leg was crippled and he had a crutch under his arm. He said, "How can I help you?"

Yang Guo was about to reply when suddenly the noise of galloping horses could be heard; two horses rushed towards the shop. On one of the horses was a Mongolian captain, on the other was a Han, Yang Guo didn't know whether he was a translator or a guide.

The Han loudly said, "Blacksmith Feng? Come over here and listen to the orders."

The old man greeted them and said, "I am he."

The Han said, "The captain has the following orders: all the blacksmiths of this town have three days to gather together at Xian city to aid the army. You have to be there tomorrow, you hear?"

Blacksmith Feng said, "I am old..."

The Mongolian captain raised his whip and said a few words.

The Han said, "If you're not there tomorrow, you'll watch your head get cut off." After he said this, the two left.

Blacksmith Feng stood there and was lost in thought. Cheng Ying saw that he was old and pitiful; she took out some money and placed it on the table. She said, "Master Feng, you're old and can't move well, won't working in the Mongolian camp lead to losing your life for no reason? Take this money and run away!"

Blacksmith Feng sighed and said, "Thank you for Miss's kindness. This old blacksmith has lived for so long, living and dying isn't much to me. But the thousands and thousands of lives of Jiangnan will be in danger."

The three of them were startled and asked, "Why?"

Blacksmith Feng said, "The Mongolian army is gathering blacksmiths to forge weapons. Once they have enough, they will definitely invade south into the land of the Song."

The three of them heard that his words were carefully thought and were very reasonable; they wanted to ask further when Blacksmith Feng said, "What do you three want to order?"

Yang Guo said, "Since Master Feng has other matters to attend to, I shouldn't disturb you but I need it urgently so I have to trouble you." Yang Guo then described the form and size of the scissors to him. The scissors were a special object but no one would have thought that as soon as Blacksmith Feng heard it, there were not any signs of surprise on his face. He nodded and pushed and pulled the air bellows and started the furnace up. He then placed two pieces of iron into the furnace.

Yang Guo said, "Will it be forged by tonight?"

Blacksmith Feng said, "I will do my best and go as fast as possible." He pulled and pushed the air bellows furiously, the coals turned a blood red color.

Sha Gu was on a table; half lying down and half sitting up. Yang Guo and the others whose homeland was Jiangnan, though young, when they heard their homeland was in danger, they were worried. The three of them looked at the furnace and thought about the trouble and strife of the world. Human lives weren't regarded as important and there was worry, hardships and danger everywhere. Though they were facing difficulties the next day, the fear in their hearts diminished a little.

In a little over two hours, blacksmith Feng had heated the iron. He used tongs in his left hand and placed the softened metal on the anvil, with his right, he used an iron hammer

to forge the metal. Though he was old, he was still strong; it seemed as if he didn't use any effort in using the hammer. After a while, the two pieces of metal started to take the rough shape of a large pairs of scissors, forming gradually.

Lu Wushuang said happily, "Sha Dan, it's going to be made in time."

Suddenly a voice from behind said coldly, "Making a pair of scissors to cut my fly whisk?" The three of them were startled and turned their heads around, only to see Li Mochou standing at the entrance, lightly waving her fly whisk about.

The weapon had yet to be finished but the enemy had arrived. Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang both drew their swords. Yang Guo looked at an iron rod by the furnace, as soon as the enemy makes her move, he will grab the rod and use it.

Li Mochou chuckled, "Forging a pair of large scissors to cut my fly whisk; only you kids would think of that. I'll sit here and wait for you to finish, there's still time." She then sat on a bench, and looked upon the three as nothing to worry about.

Yang Guo said, "That's good. I say that your fly whisk will definitely be cut by the scissors."

Li Mochou saw Sha Gu sitting up on the table and thought, "That woman took a palm of mine and is still able to sit up, she's quite good." She asked coldly, "Where's Huang Yaoshi?"

When Blacksmith Feng heard the three words 'Huang Yaoshi' he shivered and looked up at her and then immediately lowered his head, continuing with the forging.

Cheng Ying said, "You know that my master is not here, so why ask? If you knew he was still here, even if you've got the greatest gall of anyone, you wouldn't dare come."

Li Mochou gave a 'humph' sound and took out a piece of paper from her pockets and said, "Huang Yaoshi got his fame by taking in many disciples and relying on numbers to win. Huh! Out of all his disciples, which one was really able?" She waved out her left hand and the paper flew away, her arm moved slightly and a silver needle shot out, pinning the piece of paper on a pillar. She said, "I'll leave this as evidence. When that old 'Heretic' Huang comes back, he'll know who killed his two precious disciples." She turned her head around to Blacksmith Feng and said, "Work quicker, I'm getting impatient."

Blacksmith Feng squinted his red eyes and looked at the piece of paper, he saw the words:

The Master of Peach Blossom Island,
Disciples he has many,
Five against one,
It's the laughing stock of Jianghu!

He looked up at the roof and was lost in thought.

Li Mochou said, "Why aren't you working quickly?"

Blacksmith Feng lowered his head and said, "Yes, quicker, quicker." His left hand stretched out the iron tongs and held the needle and paper, he placed them into the flaming fire of the furnace; in a flash the paper burned to ash.

Everyone was extremely surprised by this event. Li Mochou was furious; she raised her fly whisk and wanted to strike down on his head but thought, "This small town blacksmith is extremely bold, could it be that he is an extraordinary

person?" She was now standing, she then slowly sat down asked, "Who are you?"

Blacksmith Feng said, "Can't you see? I'm an old blacksmith."

Li Mochou said, "Why did you burn my piece of paper?"

Blacksmith Feng said, "The words on the paper are wrong; it's best not to hang it in this shop."

Li Mochou said sternly, "What's wrong with the words?"

Blacksmith Feng said, "The Master of Peach Blossom Island has the ability to move heaven and earth, all his disciples need to do is to learn one art of his and they will be able to roam the realm. His first disciple is called Qu Lingfeng, his lightness kung fu is divine, and he is specialized in the art of the Iron Eight Trigram Palms, the variations in his martial arts are incredible. His second disciple is Chen Xuanfeng, he has trained his body to the point of that his bones and muscles are as strong as bronze and iron, impenetrable by sabers and spears. Have you heard about this?" When he was talking, he was still forging at the same time; the hammering sounds increased the force of his words.

Li Mochou was surprised when she heard him mention Qu Lingfeng; Yang Guo and others were also surprised. They would never have thought that an old blacksmith in a place like this would know about the people of Jianghu.

Li Mochou said, "Humph, there's a tale around Jianghu, that someone snuck into the imperial palace to steal treasures and he was killed by the imperial guards. That was the Qu Lingfeng with his incredible variations in martial arts. As for the Bronze Corpse Chen Xuanfeng, I heard that a little child stabbed him to death, what is so powerful about him? Impenetrable by sabers and spears, bah, such nonsense!"

Blacksmith Feng said: "Hmm, hmmm....The Master of the Peach Blossom Island's third disciple is called Mei Chaofeng, although she is a woman. Her claw and whip techniques are very fierce."

Li Mochou laughed and said, "Yes, that woman's claw and whip techniques were just too fierce, because of this the Seven Freaks of Jiangnan blinded her and later on, Western Poison Ouyang Feng shattered her lungs."

Blacksmith Feng was stunned for a while and then said bleakly, "That happened? I didn't know about it. The Master of Peach Blossom Island's fourth disciple is Lu Chengfeng, his lightness kung fu is divine, the "Slashing Air Palm" extraordinarily powerful."

Li Mochou said, "Someone with two broken legs and who can't walk, that must be Lu Chengfeng with his divine lightness kung fu. Without working legs, he should rely on the wind (Chengfeng means 'ride on the wind') to fly, Ha-ha! Powerful "Slashing Air Palm"... every palm that comes out meets thin air; that is the "Slashing Air Palm" of the Master of Peach Blossom Island."

Blacksmith Feng lowered his head, two 'chi' sounds were heard as two tear drops landed on the heated iron and turned into steam.

Lu Wushuang was sitting the closest to him and saw his tears clearly; she secretly wondered what it was about. She just saw him raised his hammer even higher, the striking sounds of the metal now even louder.

After a while, Blacksmith Feng continued, "Peach Blossom Island has four senior disciples; Qu, Chen, Mei, Lu. The fourth disciple Lu Chengfeng had not only great martial arts; he was also well versed in the arts of formations and

changes. If you meet him, you definitely won't be able to escape."

Li Mochou chuckled and said, "What use is the art of formations and changes? He built the Returning Cloud Manor by Lake Tai, the men of Jianghu said that is was extremely ingenious, but someone burned it to the ground. From then onwards there was no news of him; most probably he got burned to death along with his manor."

Feng Mofeng continued: "The beloved daughter of the Master of the Peach Blossom Island is also the leader of the Beggars' Clan. Chief Huang's intelligence is unsurpassed and she is famous throughout the realm. If she wanted to deal with you, you would never be able to see it coming."

Li Mochou scoffed: "Young Huang Rong, I dare to say that she doesn't really have any true martial arts. She just relies on her husband's fame and great martial arts. The reason why she could become the leader of the Beggars' Association is due to the fact that her teacher was Hong Qigong and he supported her in becoming the leader."

Blacksmith Feng raised his head and said sternly, "You talk rubbish priestess, all the disciples of the Master of Peach Blossom Island are highly skilled in martial arts, how could they all fall at the hands of others? Are you trying to take advantage of this country bumpkin not knowing the matters of the world?"

Li Mochou chuckled and said, "Ask those three kids and you'll know."

Blacksmith Feng turned his head towards Cheng Ying, his eyes inquiring.

Cheng Ying stood up and said gloomily, "My apprentice brothers and sisters have been unfortunate, they have all

passed away. I haven't been in the school for long, my martial arts are low and I can't help Master fight. I really am ashamed. Do you have ties with my Master?"

Blacksmith Feng didn't reply and examined her; he looked suspicious and said, "The Master of Peach Blossom Island took in another disciple in his later years?"

Cheng Ying saw that Blacksmith Feng's left leg was crippled, she suddenly had a thought and said, "Master was lonely in his later years, he ordered me to serve him at his side. With my age and study, I really wouldn't dare to say that I'm a disciple of Peach Blossom Island, I haven't even taken a single step onto Peach Blossom Island." The way she phrased her words, she admitted that she was a disciple of Peach Blossom Island.

Blacksmith Feng nodded, his eyes were very gentle, there was a feeling of being close to someone, he lowered his head and continued to forge metal, it was as if he was in deep thought about something.

Cheng Ying saw that when his hammer was in the air, it made half a circle, when it descended onto the anvil, it was tilted and dragged, the hand movements were extremely similar to her school's "Divine Descending Sword Palm Technique", she understood further and said, "When Master had spare time, he would talk to me; he talked about how years ago he sent his disciples away from the island, Chen and Mei were the ones who did wrong. Qu, Lu, Wu and Feng were innocent but because of those two they were punished. What was especially tragic was apprentice brother Feng, Feng Mofeng. He was young and had a harsh background; when Master thought about this, he would feel uncomfortable and extremely regretful."

In reality, Huang Yaoshi's character is eccentric, though his heart had these thoughts, he would never say them. Cheng Ying was warm, kind and understanding, when her Master was lonely and chatted with her, he would reveal a little of his thoughts through his words. She herself guessed what he wanted to say, though what she said right now was not exactly from her Master's mouth, it wasn't against his intentions.

From the way the two talked, Li Mochou had guessed who he was; then she heard Blacksmith Feng sigh and his tears fell like rain, 'chi' 'chi' 'chi'. As the tears struck the hot metal and turned into steam, she couldn't stop her heart from softening, but after thinking, she became strong again. She thought, "Even if they got another fighter, the old blacksmith is crippled, how could he help?" She chuckled and said, "Feng Mofeng, congratulations on your reunion with your apprentice sister."

That blacksmith was Huang Yaoshi's junior disciple Feng Mofeng. Years ago when Chen Xuanfeng and Mei Chaofeng stole the "Nine Yin Manual" and escaped from the island, Huang Yaoshi broke the legs of all the remaining disciples before expelling them from the island. Qu Lingfeng, Lu Chengfeng and Wu Tianfeng had both their legs broken, but when he came to Feng Mofeng, because he was young and his martial arts low, pity stirred in his mind and he just broke his left leg. Feng Mofeng was extremely hurt inside; he eventually came to this place and made a living as a blacksmith. He didn't keep any contacts with the Jianghu world and had silently lived here for the past thirty years. He couldn't have predicted that today he would have news of his Master and apprentices again. Huang Yaoshi saved his life from his enemies. Huang Yaoshi brought him up, his debts to him were great; no matter how Huang Yaoshi had treated him, there was no hate in his heart. When he heard

the words of Cheng Ying, his emotions were stirred and his grief and sorrow came out.

End of Chapter 15.

Chapter 16 - Avenging a Father's Death

Translated by Noodles



A cool breeze blew and pieces of Li Mochou's clothing flew away, her arms, shoulders, chest and

legs were revealed. She wasn't able to control her embarrassment; she wanted to turn around and run away when suddenly her back felt cool, a large piece of cloth flew away from her back.

Yang Guo and Lu Wushuang were both shocked and pleased to hear that blacksmith Feng was actually Cheng Ying's apprentice brother. Being Huang Yaoshi's disciple, his martial arts can't be that bad, unexpectedly they suddenly had another strong helper in this danger.

Li Mochou chuckled, "You've been expelled by your Master yet you still can't let go, isn't that extremely stupid? Today I'm going to kill three kids and a mad woman; you better just stand aside and take in the atmosphere."

Feng Mofeng said slowly, "Though I've learned martial arts, I have never fought anyone before in my life and my left leg is crippled, I can't really fight."

Li Mochou said, "Yes, that's the best thing for you, you can't afford to throw your life away."

Feng Mofeng shook his head and said, "I cannot allow you to harm a single hair of my apprentice sister's head, since these people are friends of hers you better find somewhere else to do evil."

Li Mochou's murderous intent was stirred and she laughed, "The four of you fighting me at once, that's great." She stood up.

Feng Mofeng was unmoved and kept on striking the metal with his hammer, he was like a character from an opera following prompts from a gong, he struck the metal and then followed it with a few words. He said, "I left my school

over thirty years ago, my martial arts have gone rusty long ago, I need to think hard about them.”

Li Mochou laughed and said, “Half my life I’ve roamed Jianghu but I’ve never seen a person like you who grabs the feet of Buddha and prepares for battle at the last minute. Today my eyes have been opened. Feng Mofeng, have you really never fought anyone before in your life?”

Feng Mofeng said, “I never offend others, when others beat me and insult me I don’t do anything, so of course my hands have never been raised against anyone.”

Li Mochou chuckled and said, “Ha-ha, old ‘Heretic’ Huang actually picked a bunch of face losing crap to be his disciples.”

Feng Mofeng said, “Please don’t speak ill of my merciful Master like that.”

Li Mochou gave a wry laugh and said, “He abandoned you as a Master long ago yet you still merciful Master this, merciful that, you’re not afraid of making people laugh.”

Feng Mofeng continued to strike down with his hammer and said, “I have no one in this world, the only loved one I have is my merciful Master, if I don’t respect him, love him, who should I think about? Little apprentice sister, is Master well?”

Cheng Ying said, “Master is very well.” Feng Mofeng’s face lit up with joy. When Li Mochou saw his feelings, she thought, “Old ‘Heretic’ Huang is a good Master, and indeed there is something great about him. He beat his disciple into this state yet this person still remains loyal to him.”

The metal that was being forged was now gradually getting colder, Feng Mofeng again used his tongs to place the metal

into the furnace but he was preoccupied and actually sent the hammer in his right hand into the furnace instead. Li Mochou laughed and said, "Blacksmith Feng, just slowly think about your Master's martial arts, there's no need to lose your mind as well." Feng Mofeng didn't reply and stared at the flaming furnace in deep thought, after a while, he sent the crutch under his left arm into the furnace.

Yang Guo and Lu Wushuang both said, "That's your crutch!"

Cheng Ying also called out, "Apprentice brother!"

Feng Mofeng still did not reply and gazed into the furnace. The crutch didn't burn in the furnace, instead it gradually became red; the crutch was actually made of metal. After another while, the hammer also became red but his hands weren't burned as he held onto the handle of the hammer and crutch. Li Mochou's disdain turned into precaution, she knew that this rough looking man must have qualities that excel. She was afraid that he would suddenly attack and she would fall victim to him so she urgently waved her fly whisk about to protect her front's fatal areas and leapt outside, calling out, "Blacksmith Feng, let's just get it over with!"

Feng Mofeng responded and exited the shop, his movements were swift and light, it didn't look like he was crippled. He placed his red crutch into the ground and said, "Angelic Priestess", please don't insult my Master and please stop troubling my apprentice sister. And spare the bitter life of this old blacksmith!"

Li Mochou was again greatly surprised and thought "Why is he begging just before he's about to fight?" She said, "I will spare you only; if you are afraid then don't intervene."

Feng Mofeng clenched his teeth and said, "Fine, then kill me first!" As he said this, he trembled; he was afraid but was also emotional.

Li Mochou raised her fly whisk and struck down towards his head. Feng Mofeng quickly leapt away, his dodging was very sharp but his arms trembled, he actually was afraid to counterattack. Li Mochou attacked three times in a row but each time, Feng Mofeng avoided the attacks with great movements yet he still did not counterattack. Yang Guo and the others were standing to the side watching; when the time came they will go and help. They saw that Li Mochou's attacks were gradually intensifying and Feng Mofeng really looked like someone who has never fought before. In accordance with his peaceful nature, he didn't make an attack with his red hammer.

Yang Guo thought that this isn't good, though this person's martial arts are strong, he didn't have any intent to fight, and he must be stirred so he said loudly, "Li Mochou, why did you insult Island Master Huang by calling him heartless, unrighteous and wicked?"

Li Mochou thought, "When did I insult him?" She sped up her attacks and did not reply.

Yang Guo continued, "You said that Island Master Huang seduced other's daughters and wives, captured other's sons and brothers, did you see that with your own eyes? You said he lied to friends, betrayed his benefactors, did those things really happen? Why did you spread all these things over the world of Jianghu and tarnish Island Master Huang's name?"

Cheng Ying was startled and didn't understand, Feng Mofeng's fury erupted when he heard this, his valor stirred and he attacked with his hammer and crutch at the same time. His left leg was on the ground, assuming the form "Golden Cockerel Standing Alone", it was like he was nailed to the ground, sturdy and still; the hammer and crutch produced a fierce gust of blazing air, heading straight towards Li Mochou. Li Mochou saw that the incoming force

was ferocious, she didn't dare to meet it front on and leapt out of the way, looking for a gap to attack him.

Yang Guo carried on, "Li Mochou, you said that Island Master Huang is a liar and a shameless scoundrel. I say that you're the shameless one!"

Feng Mofeng was becoming angrier and angrier as he heard this, the hammer and crutch swept and lunged forward with unstoppable force, at first his stances looked rather rusty but as he fought on, they became more and more fluid. The two's internal energy weren't that far apart but Li Mochou had roamed Jianghu for many years and had been in hundreds of battles; her experience was far greater than his. After about twenty or thirty stances, Li Mochou knew that Feng Mofeng's internal energy wasn't weak but he lacked experience and had one good leg only. After a while, she knew that he would lose so she decided to wait until his anger disperses and then counterattack. Indeed, after another ten or so moves Feng Mofeng's anger gradually disappeared, his will faded and he began to slip away. Li Mochou was thrilled and attacked with her fly whisk towards his chest.

Feng Mofeng swept his hammer across to block. The fly whisk curved its way around and wrapped around the hammer's head; this was the special stance that Li Mochou used to take the opponent's weapon. All she needed to do was trap the weapon and pull; the hammer would then leave Feng Mofeng's hand. But as she did this, 'chi' 'chi' 'chi' sounds were heard, smoke rose, everyone smelt an unpleasant smell; the hairs of the fly whisk were burned off.

Instead of taking the opponent's weapon, Li Mochou had lost her own, she remained calm and threw the handle of the fly whisk away and changed her attack to her "Divine Five Poison Palm". Though this palm technique was

powerful, one has to be very close to the opponent to use it. Feng Mofeng had a hammer in his right hand and a crutch in his left, he was using it swiftly and forcefully with gusts of wind generated, he was now able to do as he wished. However in between the two images, smoke kept on rising up; Li Mochou's gown was being burned by the hot hammer and crutch, piece by piece her gown was getting burned. She was furious, she was definitely going to gain victory but the old blacksmith had an advantage in his weaponry. She could not take it at all and wanted to strike him with a palm to vent her anger.

This was the first time that Feng Mofeng fought somebody, if he had been held back and on the receiving end of a beating, he would have retreated; but now he had the upper hand, the stances of the hammer and crutch were coming out with extreme mastery. Li Mochou was almost struck by the hammer and crutch a few times in her quest to land a palm on him, if it wasn't for her speed, her palm would have been burned. Suddenly Feng Mofeng called out, "I don't want to fight; I don't want to fight, look at you, what decency have you left?" With his single good leg he leapt back five feet.

Li Mochou was stunned, a cool breeze blew and pieces of her clothing flew away, her arms, shoulders, chest and legs were revealed. She was a virgin, she wasn't able to control her embarrassment; she wanted to turn around and run away when suddenly her back felt cool, a large piece of cloth flew away from her back.

Yang Guo saw that she was in a wretched state, he tore off his belt and took off his gown; he circulated his internal energy and shot it over to her. The gown was like a person hugging her. Li Mochou quickly put her arms in the sleeves of the gown and buttoned it up. She has seen countless battles in her life but right now she was frightened and

embarrassed. Her face was red one moment, white the next, she didn't know whether or not to keep on fighting. She thought, "If I fight him again, this gown will be burned off again, I can only swallow my anger and do something about it later."

She nodded at Yang Guo, thanking him for giving her the gown. She then turned her head towards Feng Mofeng and said, "These crafty weapons are indeed the evil skills of old 'Heretic' Huang. To tell the truth, if it was a battle with proper martial arts alone, could you beat me? If old 'Heretic' Huang's disciples fought fairly and squarely one on one with me, could they beat me?"

Feng Mofeng said with ease, "If you didn't lose your weapon, after a while, you'd be able to beat me."

Li Mochou said arrogantly, "It's good that you know it. My words on that piece of paper about the disciples of Peach Blossom Island winning by numbers aren't wrong."

Feng Mofeng lowered his head and pondered, after a while he said, "That is not correct! If my apprentice brothers and sister Qu, Chen, Mei, and Lu were here, any one of them would be stronger than you. I don't even need to mention my highly skilled apprentice brothers Qu and Chen; you wouldn't be able to beat my apprentice sister Mei Chaofeng who's also a woman like you."

Li Mochou chuckled and said, "All those people are dead and can't prove anything, why are you talking about them? Old 'Heretic' Huang's martial arts aren't all that good. I wanted to test out his daughter Mrs. Guo's martial arts but I don't think there's a need to now." She turned around and was about to leave.

Yang Guo had a thought in his mind and said, "Wait!"

Li Mochou's brows raised and she said, "What?"

Yang Guo said, "You're wrong about Island Master Huang's martial arts being so-so. I heard of swordplay from him, called the "Jade Flute Swordplay", it can neutralize your fly whisk techniques." He picked up an iron rod and drew on the ground. He explained, "Your attacks from the front are indeed swift and powerful but if his sword cuts down from this direction, you will not be able to take back your attack. If you counterattack, the sword will attack quickly from this direction. If you sweep the fly whisk and attack the pressure points, then he'll use a tiger claw form and grab your whisk's tips, turn his sword around and use the handle to strike the 'virtuous' pressure point on your shoulder. Can you imagine that?"

That stance was indeed unimaginably strange but it was also ingenious. Brushing the pressure points in front of her were one of Li Mochou's fly whisk technique's lethal stances, the stance that Yang Guo described left her with no reply, in such a case she could only throw down her fly whisk and admit defeat. Yang Guo made another comparison and said, "When it comes to your "Divine Five Poison Palm", Island Master Huang will use his fingernail to neutralize your palm. When your palm arrives, he will use the "Divine Release of the Flicking Finger", his fingernail flicking against your palm; how can your palm not be crippled as a result? All he needs to do is to immediately cut off his fingernail and the palm's poison won't spread to his body." He continued and described over ten other different stances that could neutralize her martial arts.

These words turned Li Mochou's face grey, every word of his was reasonable and logical, the stances that he described were ingenious; she wouldn't be able to fend them off.

Yang Guo said, "Island Master Huang was angry at your words; he has the status of being a great Master and cannot fight you personally so he passed these techniques to me so I could take care of you. But I thought about how my Master and you are still apprentice sisters. Today I give you a warning about the power of Island Master Huang, next time you see his disciples, you better run as far away as possible."

Li Mochou was silent for a while and then said, "I give up...I give up!" She turned around and ran away; in a flash her image disappeared behind the hills, her speed was really something rarely seen in the world of Jianghu.

In reality, although Huang Yaoshi did pass these techniques to Yang Guo, to be able to reach a state where he could use it to neutralize and defeat an enemy requires years of practice. Yang Guo's description of these techniques was enough to intimidate and overawe her and from now on she would never dare to say one derisive word about Huang Yaoshi.

In the vicinity of Li Mochou, Lu Wushuang's heart would jump at the sound of her voice; when she saw that Li Mochou had gone, it was like a heavy load had been removed from her. She clapped and laughed, saying, "Sha Dan! You're pretty good with words; you could even scare away my Master."

Cheng Ying had seen Yang Guo throw away the gown she had personally made to Li Mochou. It was a pressing situation then and that was that; but she saw that underneath the new gown, he was still wearing the torn and ragged old one. She knew that Xiao Longnu must have made it; he was attached to familiar things and would never forget about things of old. Her heart ached a little but she pretended she didn't care. Then, the four of them returned

to the shop to take a look at Sha Gu. Just as they entered the sudden clamor of men and neighing of horses could be heard from beyond the hills; the four of them turned around.

Yang Guo said, "I'll go take a look." He leapt on his horse and galloped around the hill and arrived at the main road. He saw dust and dirt flying up everywhere; it was a division of Mongolian soldiers heading south, they had iron bows and long sabers, their force like a crashing wave. Yang Guo has never seen an army marching before, he watched with a thumping heart, stunned.

Two soldiers raised their long sabers and shouted, "Barbarian, what are you looking at?" They rushed over. Yang Guo turned his horse around and galloped away, the two Mongolian soldiers raised their bows and shot an arrow towards his back. Yang Guo turned his head back and caught them but felt the great force behind the arrows. If he didn't know martial arts, these arrows would have pierced his chest. The two soldiers were frightened when they saw his abilities and reined in their horses, not daring to continue pursuing him. Yang Guo returned to the blacksmiths and told them what he saw.

Feng Mofeng sighed, "The Mongolian army are indeed heading south. The Chinese citizens are going to suffer!"

Yang Guo said, "The Song army will not be able to defend against the archery techniques of the Mongolian army; this is going to be a great disaster."

Feng Mofeng said, "This is just the time for a brave and heroic young man like Master Yang; why don't you return south and join the army and help fight off the invaders?"

Yang Guo was taken aback, he said, "No, I have to go north to find my Gu Gu. The Mongolian army's power is vast; I'm

just one person, what use would I be?"

Feng Mofeng shook his head and said, "Though the force of one person is small, the force of many is strong. If everyone thought like you, who'd come out to defend the country against invaders?"

Yang Guo knew that his words were right, but now, there was nothing more important to him than finding his Gu Gu. He had wandered around Jianghu ever since he was small; he had suffered the abuse of officials. He saw that the Mongolians were indeed violent and ruthless, but the Song Emperor may not be a good person himself. There was no need for him to help the emperor. He just gave a wry smile and didn't reply. Feng Mofeng gathered his hammer, tongs and air bellows and hung them across his back; he turned to Cheng Ying and said, "Apprentice Sister, when you see Master please tell him that disciple Feng Mofeng will never forget his teachings. Today I'm going to join the Mongolian army and I'm going to kill one or two of these generals who are invading my land. Apprentice sister, take care. I'm extremely delighted at seeing a disciple of Master's." He supported himself on his crutch and left, not even turning his head again; he didn't take another look at Yang Guo.

Yang Guo looked at Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang, he said, "It was unexpected that we would meet such a person like him here."

Lu Wushuang favored Yang Guo in her heart and said, "Cousin, apart from you, the people under the tutelage of your Master are either mad or crazy."

Cheng Ying smiled and said mildly, "Everyone has their own will, you can't force them. You said he was mad and crazy; he in turn might be calling us heartless. Anyway, don't I possess a touch of madness and craziness myself?"

Yang Guo's heart jumped when he heard this, she looked different and he couldn't tell whether her words were meant to be ambiguous. Suddenly a thumping sound was heard as Sha Gu fell from her bench. The three of them were alarmed and quickly put her up on a bed; her face was red and her eyes stared ahead blankly, the poison from the "Divine Five Poison Palm" was flaring up again.

Cheng Ying fed her some medicine while Yang Guo helped her sooth her pressure points. Sha Gu looked at him startled, her face was full of fear as she called out, "Brother Yang, don't look for me for revenge, it wasn't me who killed you."

Cheng Ying said softly, "Sister, don't be scared, he isn't..."

Yang Guo suddenly thought, "She's not fully conscious at the moment, I can force her to reveal the truth." He turned his hands and grabbed onto her wrists and said with a severe tone, "Who killed me? If you don't tell me then I'll take my revenge on you."

Sha Gu begged, "Brother Yang, it's not me."

Yang Guo said angrily, "You're not telling me! Fine, I'll strangle you to death!" He stretched his hands around her throat. Sha Gu gave out a piercing scream. How would Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang know what Yang Guo was doing, they both called out to stop him, one called out, "Brother Yang", the other called out, "Sha Dan!" One said, "Don't frighten her further", the other said, "Why are you mucking around at a time like this?"

Yang Guo didn't take any notice; he closed his hands slightly tighter, the expression of an evil spirit was on his face; he clenched his teeth and said, "I'm brother Yang's evil ghost. I died a horrible death, do you know that?"

Sha Gu said, "I know, after you died, crows ate your flesh."

Yang Guo's heart felt as if a knife was plunged into his heart, he knew that his father had died under someone else's hands but he didn't know that after he died, his body was actually eaten by crows and wasn't buried, he called out, "Who killed me? Tell me, tell me."

Sha Gu strained out, "It was you who hit Auntie, Auntie had poison needles on her body, you died."

Yang Guo yelled loudly, "Who is this Auntie?"

Sha Gu couldn't breathe with Yang Guo holding her throat and wanted to faint, she said quietly, "Auntie is auntie."

Yang Guo said, "What's Auntie's surname? What's her name?"

Sha Gu said, "I... I... don't know, let me go!"

Lu Wushuang saw that the situation was becoming urgent; she went over to pull away Yang Guo's hands. Right now, Yang Guo was like a madman, he waved out with all his strength, how could Lu Wushuang defend herself? She was thrown away and crashed into a wall painfully. Cheng Ying saw that the usually peaceful, warm and graceful Yang Guo was now like a mad tiger, she was so frightened that her limbs went limp.

Yang Guo thought, "If today I can't get the name of the person who killed my father, I'll immediately throw up blood and die." He asked, "Is Auntie's surname Qu? Is Auntie's name Mei?" He thought that since Sha Gu's surname was Qu, her auntie's surname would most probably be Qu, or perhaps it could have been Mei Chaofeng.

Sha Gu struggled with all her strength, though she has practiced martial arts for a longer time than Yang Guo, her

martial arts couldn't compare to his. The pressure points on her wrist were being held and she couldn't break free, she could only say urgently, "Go and find Auntie for revenge, don't... don't look for me!"

Yang Guo said, "Where's your Auntie?"

Sha Gu said, "Me and Grandpa left! She's with a man on the island."

Yang Guo's spine chilled when he heard these words, he quivered, "What does your Auntie call your Grandpa?"

Sha Gu said, "Father, what else?"

Yang Guo's face went grey but he was afraid he was wrong and asked, "Your Auntie's man is called Guo Jing, isn't he?"

Sha Gu said, "I don't know. Auntie just calls him 'brother Jing, brother Jing (Jing ge ge)!" She copied the way Huang Rong called Guo Jing; suddenly her legs flailed about and squealed, "Help, help! Ghost... ghost..."

What doubts did Yang Guo have now? All the suffering and bitterness of the past rushed to the surface and he thought, "If father wasn't killed, my mother wouldn't have been in pain all the time and die so early like that. I wouldn't have endured all the pain and suffering I've been through." He continued, "When I was on Peach Blossom Island, the Guo couple were not at ease with me, they were a bit too polite, they seemed to be covering up something and didn't treat me like the Wu brothers. Telling them how things are, shouting at them when needed. I felt something then but how would I know that it was because they carried the guilt of killing my father. It's because of this that they didn't want to teach me martial arts and sent me to the Quanzhen sect to suffer." His anger and fear stirred throughout him, his

limbs became limp. Sha Gu called out loudly and leapt up from the bed.

Cheng Ying went over to Yang Guo and said softly, "Sister Sha has always been a bit crazy, you know about this. She's even worse after suffering this injury, don't believe her whatever you do." But in her heart she believed that the words of Sha Gu were true, and she knew that consoling him like this would be no use. But her heart couldn't endure seeing his face full of anger, despair, bitterness and sorrow.

Yang Guo did not take in any of these words; he stood there stunned for a while before calling out. He got on his horse, kicked with his legs and the horse galloped forward, in a flash it had gone over a hundred feet. Faint calls of 'Sha Dan!' and 'Brother Yang!' were heard behind him but he ignored them. The only thought in his mind was, "I need to take revenge, I need to take revenge!"

He galloped in a single stretch for two hours and had gone tens of li. Suddenly he felt a pain on his lips; he lifted his hand and felt them. His hand was covered in blood; in his anger and pain, he had bitten down and actually pierced his lower lip. He thought, "Auntie Guo has always treated me badly, but recently she suddenly began to treat me well, but it was all fake. I don't care about this but Uncle Guo... Uncle Guo..." He had always revered Guo Jing; he felt that his actions and martial arts were one of a kind, and he had always treated him exceedingly well. Now he knew that this was one big lie; he felt that this person was even more cunning than Huang Rong. Anger and resentment filled him, almost bursting out of his chest.

When he thought about the pain he was in; he got off the horse, covered his head and began to cry. This release of sorrow was extremely distressing; it was like all of the world's pain and troubles had all amassed in him. He had

never seen his father and had never heard anyone talk about him; not even his own mother. But ever since he was little, he had the image of the perfect father in his mind; there wasn't another who was as kind as him. Yet this hero was killed by a devious trick of Guo Jing and Huang Rong.

He cried for a while before hearing the sounds of horses; four horses galloped from the north, the riders all Mongolian warriors. The first rider was holding a long spear; on the spear was a child that was two or three years of age. He was laughing as he galloped along. The baby was still alive; it was giving out a weak cry. The four warriors were a little surprised when they saw Yang Guo in the middle of the road but a ragged clothed young Han like him could be found everywhere so they didn't take any notice. One of them called out, "Move out of the way, move out of the way." As he said this, he thrust his spear forward.

Yang Guo was deep in the middle of his troubles right now; without thinking he pulled the spearhead forward and dragged the warrior down. He turned his hand and swept the spear; the warrior went flying over ten feet away, his skull was crushed and he died. When the remaining three warriors saw his valor, they called out, turned around and galloped away. A 'pai' sound was heard as the baby fell onto the ground.

Yang Guo ran up to it and saw that it was a Han child; it was healthy, chubby, and very cute. The pierce to its stomach wouldn't kill it right away but it would be difficult for it to recover and live. It was calling out 'a' 'a' 'a', as if it was calling out for its mother. Yang Guo was overwhelmed with sorrow and grief and sympathy stirred in his heart. He picked up the barely alive baby and tears flowed again; he saw that its pain was unbearable so he lightly gave it a palm and stopped its pain. He used the Mongolian warrior's spear to dig a hole so he could bury the baby.

He dug ten or so times before he heard the thunderous noise of horses and horns; a group of Mongolian soldiers were rushing towards him. Yang Guo's left hand held the dead baby; his right extended the spear as he got on the horse. The skinny horse was actually an experienced battle horse; when it saw it was about to go into battle, its spirits soared; it neighed and charged towards the Mongolian soldiers. Yang Guo's hand raised, the spear descended, he turned over three or four soldiers in one go, but he saw that countless soldiers were coming; he turned the horse around, went onto the wild lands and rode away. Arrows rained down behind him like locusts; he swung the spear and deflected the arrows away. The skinny horse was extremely fast; in a short while it had left the Mongolian soldiers behind but it didn't stop; it continued galloping away like the wind into the wild lands.

After another while, Yang Guo saw that the sky was beginning to get dark; he looked around and saw that long grass and strange rocks were everywhere. Dusk was covering the area; it was quiet without any sounds of people, and there wasn't even a crow or sparrow about. He got off the horse with the baby still held in his hands. The face still looked alive but covered in extreme suffering; pain filled his heart, he thought, "The parents of this child must have loved it very much; now that he's dead, his parents must be feeling great pain. I don't know how many people have died by the hands of these vicious and violent Mongolian soldiers as they head south."

The more he thought about it, the more difficult he found to endure; he dug a hole by a large tree and buried the child. He then thought about the words of Sha Gu again, "When this child died, it had me to bury it, but my father's body was eaten by crows. You killed him, what harm is there in

burying him? You really are evil! If I don't take revenge, Yang Guo isn't a human!"

That night he slept in a tree. The next morning he rode the horse and let the horse go as it pleased; sometimes he thought about going back to the tomb to see Xiao Longnu, and at others he would think about how he must kill Guo Jing and Huang Rong first, no matter what, to avenge his father. When he felt hungry, he would pluck wild fruits to eat.

On the fourth day, he saw someone faraway, leaping up to a tree to pick some wild fruits. Yang Guo rode closer and saw that it was the disciple of Jinlun Fawang, Da'erba. Every time he jumped, he could only pick one fruit; eventually he became impatient and attacked the tree a few times. The tree gave a 'craack' as it broke; he then plucked the wild fruits from the tree and placed them in his pockets.

Yang Guo thought, "Could it be that Jinlun Fawang is nearby?"

He and Jinlun Fawang originally didn't have any ties; but now he had recognized Guo Jing and Huang Rong as his father's killers. He regretted helping Guo Jing and Huang Rong in opposing Fawang; he quietly followed Da'erba to see where he was going. He saw him moving like he was flying, straight towards the mountains. Yang Guo got off the horse and followed from a distance behind. Da'erba headed into a forest; the further he went, the higher he got. Yang Guo followed him up to the peak of a mountain.

At the top of the mountain was a small exposed hut. Jinlun Fawang was sitting in the middle of the hut, meditating with his eyes closed and eyebrows drooping down. Da'erba put the wild fruits down on the floor and turned around; his face changed as he suddenly saw Yang Guo approaching.

He called out, "Senior apprentice brother, you've come to cause further harm to Master?" He dashed forward to Yang Guo and stretched out his arm to twist the front of his garment. His martial arts are better than Yang Guo's, but he was affected by the perilous situation that his Master was in and in his fear he lost control of his state of mind. This stance was a mess and broke one of the rules of martial arts; Yang Guo grabbed his arm in return and tossed him away.

Da'erba had always thought that Yang Guo was the reincarnation of his senior apprentice brother and now he was thrown on the ground by him; he rolled over a few times, picked himself up and then leapt in front of Yang Guo.

Yang Guo thought that he was going to raise his hands again so he took a step backwards, he didn't know that Da'erba would suddenly fall down to his knees and kowtow, "Senior apprentice brother, please remember your relationship with Master in your previous life. Master has a serious injury and is now trying to recuperate, if you disturb him, then... then..." His voice croaked as he reached this point and tears flowed.

Though Yang Guo did not understand his Tibetan, from his emotional state and Jinlun Fawang's distressed look, he more or less understood. He quickly helped him up and said, "Relax, I'm not going to harm your Master."

Da'erba saw that his face was gentle and peaceful; he was pleased. Although he didn't understand his words, his wariness started to go away.

Right at this time, Jinlun Fawang opened his eyes; he was shocked when he saw Yang Guo. He was concentrating on circulating his chi and didn't hear the words of Da'erba and

Yang Guo. Suddenly he saw the enemy in front of him; he gave a sigh and said slowly, "I have practiced martial arts for many years but I still have yet to find a way to break through the echelon barrier, I didn't know that today I would die in the central plains." When he suffered that blow from the rock, he had suffered serious internal injuries; in the past few days he had built a hut on the top of the mountain so he could recuperate. It was unexpected that Yang Guo would actually find his way here. He wasn't able to use even one ounce of strength at the moment; he immediately ordered Da'erba to force Yang Guo away. But in the middle of their battle his state of mind would be disturbed and it would be difficult to recover from this serious injury.

How would he know that Yang Guo would bow; then say, "I have not come here to do any harm to the Reverend, please don't be wary."

Jinlun Fawang shook his head and was about to say something when he felt a severe pain in his chest; he quickly closed his eyes and circulated his chi. Yang Guo went inside the hut and stretched out his right hand, placing it on the 'To Yang' pressure point. This pressure point is just below the seventh vertebrae and is one of the major pressure point that regulates the veins and arteries.

Da'erba was shocked when he saw this; he sent out a fist towards Yang Guo. Yang Guo shook his left hand and made a signal with his eyes.

Da'erba saw that nothing was wrong with his Master, a slight smile was forming on his face and he took back his fist.

Yang Guo's internal energy was not deep and he didn't know anything about Tibetan internal energy; when he felt

a Fawang's internal chi stirring, he circulated his internal energy and sent chi to him to help him clear upwards the 'Spirit Stage', 'Divine Route', 'Body Pillar' and 'Chest Route'; then clearing the downwards 'Withdrawing Muscle', 'Central Hinge', 'Central Spine' and the 'Suspending Hinge' pressure points. These were up to Fawang; he could only help him protect his veins and arteries.

Though Da'erba's martial arts were strong, all he'd learned were external martial arts and couldn't help his Master to recuperate. In the past few days he could only worry anxiously.

Since Jinlun Fawang now had no worries, his chi ran through his body and he used all his strength to heal the injuries in his chest and lower abdomen; after two hours the pain had lessened and his face was red. He opened his eyes and nodded to thank Yang Guo; he joined his palms and said, "Master Yang, why are you suddenly helping me?"

Yang Guo did not hide anything from him; he told him how he recently found out that Guo Jing and Huang Rong killed his father, and how he decided to go and take revenge. He explained how he accidentally bumped into Da'erba and followed him here.

Jinlun Fawang knew that this young man was crafty; in ten words it was difficult for him to believe one of them. But today, killing him would have been as easy as turning his palm, but instead of killing him, Yang Guo actually helped him to recuperate. He really did not have any ill intent towards him and he said, "So Master Yang has such heavy matters on him. But the Guo couple's martial arts are extremely high, I'm afraid that it would be difficult for Master Yang to take revenge."

Yang Guo was silent, after a while he said, "Fine, then both father and son will die at their hands!"

Fawang said, "At first, I thought I was invincible and just by my power alone, I could hold down the heroes of the central plains and take the position of the Chancellor of Wulin. But the warriors of the central plains do not follow the rules of fighting one on one, and they all came at once; I can only make another plan. When I've recovered, I'm going to need to invite many skilled fighters to assist me. Once my forces are large, the central plains martial artists can't use numbers to overcome me and everyone can compete fairly. Have you got intentions of joining my side?"

Yang Guo was about to agree but he thought about the killings by the Mongolian soldiers and said, "I cannot help Mongolia."

Fawang shook his head and said, "If you want to kill the Guo couple by yourself, it would be almost impossible."

Yang Guo thought for a while and said, "Fine, I'll help you get the position of the Chancellor of Wulin, you help me to take my revenge."

Jinlun Fawang stretched out his palm and said, "That's settled, we'll exchange palms to seal this deal."

The two of them exchanged three palms to set this deal.

Yang Guo said, "I'm just going to help you to take the position of the Chancellor of Wulin, I cannot help you in your quest to help the Mongols attack Jiangnan and kill its citizens."

Jinlun Fawang laughed and said, "Everyone has their will, one cannot force them. Brother Yang, don't mind me commenting, but your martial arts have many styles;

learning martial arts from many schools is of course good, but it would be unavoidable that your martial arts won't be refined. What is your most proficient skill? What martial arts are you planning to use against the Guo couple?"

Those words froze Yang Guo's tongue; it was hard for him to reply. Yang Guo has had extraordinary encounters in his life and his character was also covetous; Quanzhen, Ouyang Feng, Ancient Tomb, the Nine Yin, Hong Qigong and Huang Yaoshi, he had learned numerous martial arts from these schools. All the martial arts of these schools are ingenious and Masterly, but they all need a lifetime of difficult work to reach the upper level of these skills. He took a bit here and a bit there, but none of his martial arts had actually reached a great level.

When he meets second rate fighters, the martial arts he uses are all flowery and fancy, causing confusion to opponents; but when he meets a first rate martial artist, he will eventually be proved inferior. He can't even compare to Jinlun Fawang's disciples Da'erba and Huo Dou. He lowered his head and pondered about it; these words by Jinlun Fawang were a real warning to him and showed up the weakness in the foundations of his martial arts.

He had another thought, "Since I've decided to stay with Gu Gu forever, how can I have relationships everywhere? Cheng Ying, Wifey and there's also Wanyan Ping. I don't have any real feelings for them, how can I treat them improperly like this? Being greedy is really not a good thing." He continued thinking, "No matter if it's Hong Qigong, Huang Yaoshi, Ouyang Feng or even the Quanzhen Seven Masters and Jinlun Fawang, every one of them is a famous Master. They just practiced the martial arts of their own school; they understand other sect's and school's martial arts but they don't practice them. They just make

themselves aware of them. In that case, what school of martial arts should I concentrate on?"

Based on his background, he should concentrate on the "Jade Heart Manual" of the Ancient Tomb sect; but then he thinks about the Mastery and ingenuity of Hong Qigong's "Dog Beating Stick Technique", the subtlety of Huang Yaoshi's "Jade Flute Swordplay"; if he ignores all of them, isn't that a pity? There's godfather's "Toad Stance" and "Reversal of the Veins". There are the martial arts of the "Nine Yin Manual" as well. Any one of them is enough to make your name in the world. It was difficult to learn them, how can I just give them up like that?"

He left the hut and walked around the peak, thinking bitterly; it was extremely troubling. He thought for half a day when suddenly his mind lit up, "Why don't I take the best of all these schools and form my own? The martial arts of the world were all formed by someone; if others can do this, could it be that I can't?" His eyes lit up as he thought about it. He thought from morning to midday, from midday to night and didn't eat or drink. All the martial arts he had seen in his life were floating around in his mind, clashing with each other. He had seen Ouyang Feng and Hong Qigong compete martial arts verbally and he himself frightened away Li Mochou by using words from his mouth; but right now, the martial arts competing in his mind were even more rapid and spectacular than describing them verbally. Eventually he involuntarily started to wave out fists and kicks. At first, it could be distinguished that this stance was from Hong Qigong, the other was Ouyang Feng but eventually everything became muddled up, he couldn't hold on any longer and fainted.

Da'erba watched from afar, he saw that he was acting crazy, pointing out his hand and sweeping his legs, he didn't understand what it was all about. Suddenly he saw him

falling onto the ground, he wanted to go over there and help him but Jinlun Fawang laughed and said; "Don't disturb his thoughts. It's a pity that your intelligence is mediocre and you can't grasp the meanings within."

Yang Guo slept for half a night and continued with his thoughts the next morning. In seven days, he fell unconscious five times. He thought he wanted to invent his own school of martial arts, but how easy is that? With his present abilities it would be almost impossible to succeed. This isn't something that can be achieved in ten days or two weeks. But after studying for several days, he suddenly understood. Since he couldn't combine all these martial arts together, there was no need to force the issue. He realized that all martial arts were at his fingertips; later on when he meets an enemy, he'll use whichever is needed. There was no need to think about the source of the martial art and this wasn't far off from his intentions of forming his own school. Once he understood this point, he was immediately filled with comfort.

In the past few days, Jinlun Fawang has been self-recuperating; his injury was now almost fully recovered and he can move as freely as usual. Today, he saw Yang Guo's expression was now at ease and calm, and knew that he had advanced another level in his martial arts. He said, "Little brother Yang, I'll take you to see someone. This person is a great hero, an extremely open minded person, once you see him you'll definitely be in awe."

Yang Guo said, "Who?"

Jinlun Fawang said, "The Mongolian Prince Khubilai. He is the grandson of Genghis Khan and the fourth son of Prince Tolui."

After seeing the unrestrained violence of the Mongolian soldiers, Yang Guo hated Mongolians; he frowned and said, "I'm anxious to avenge my father, I don't need to see that Mongolian prince."

Jinlun Fawang laughed and said, "I agreed to help you, how can I break my word? But I was summoned here by Khubilai; I need to go and see him. His camp is not far from here; it's within one day's travel."

Yang Guo had no choice but to agree; he alone was not a match for Guo Jing and Huang Rong whether it came to a battle of wits or strength. Without Jinlun Fawang's help, it would be difficult for him to take revenge; he could only go along with him.

Jinlun Fawang was the First Protector of Mongolia and the Mongolian soldiers revered him. When they saw him, they immediately went and told the news to their prince. Mongolians have always lived in tents; though they've entered a city, they weren't used to living in palaces. Because of this, Khubilai stayed in the tents of the encampment.

Fawang took him along to the royal tent. Yang Guo saw that this tent was twice as large as a normal Mongolian tent but the arrangement within was very simple and crude. A twenty-five or six year old man was sitting down reading. When this person saw the two enter, he quickly got up to meet them and laughed, "I haven't seen the Protector for many days, I have been thinking about you."

Jinlun Fawang said, "Your highness, I'll introduce you to a young hero. Though this brother Yang is young, he is an extraordinary personality."

Yang Guo knew that this Khubilai is Genghis Khan's grandson; if he didn't have a noble appearance then at least

he should have a powerful air around him. How would he know that this person was just a Han speaking, modest and mild young man; he was rather surprised.

Khubilai studied Yang Guo. He pulled on Fawang with his left hand and then said to his servant, "Quickly bring some wine, I want to have a drink with this brother."

The servant brought in three bowls of Mongolian milk wine. Khubilai took a bowl and drank it all in one go. Fawang did the same. Yang Guo rarely drank wine, but now that the host has shown his hospitality, it wouldn't be appropriate to reject it; so he took the wine and drank it all in one go. He felt the wine was extremely harsh and rather sour.

Khubilai laughed, "Little brother, how beautiful is this wine?"

Yang Guo said, "This wine is harsh and sour, it's like a knife going into your mouth; the taste isn't great but this is something that a true man drinks."

Khubilai was pleased and called for more wine; each of them drank three bowls. Yang Guo's internal energy was profound enough; he maintained his composure as he drank.

Khubilai said with joy; "Protector, where did you find this talented young man? My Mongolia is really fortunate."

Jinlun Fawang then revealed Yang Guo's history to him; he played up Yang Guo with his words, describing him as if he was one of the eminent figures of the central plains. When Yang Guo heard how Jinlun Fawang described him, he couldn't help but feel a little proud.

Khubilai was ordered to take the Song land and has stayed in the central plains for a while now. He liked Han culture,

his companion was Confucius; he read books and studied scriptures. He employed skilled martial artists, made acquaintances with them, planning to go south and attack the Song.

If it were another person who saw such a young man like Yang Guo, it would be difficult for them to accept Fawang's words. But Khubilai was a wise and supremely magnanimous and he also had believed Jinlun Fawang without question; he was delighted and ordered a feast.

In a short while a feast was set up, wine and food which included both Han and Mongolian dishes, the bowls overflowed.

Khubilai said to his servant, "Invite the heroes from the Virtuous Guesthouse." The servant complied and exited the tent.

Khubilai said, "Some able people have been made guests here in the past few days; it really is my country's luck to have these people. But the thing is, that they cannot compare with Fawang and gentleman Yang."

In the middle of this, the servant returned with the guests; the tent door opened and in came four people.

The first one that came in was tall and skinny, his face was pale, and he looked like a corpse. Khubilai introduced him to Fawang and Yang Guo, he was Xiangxi's Xiaoxiang Zi.

The second person was extremely short and dark; he was a skilled fighter from Tian Zhu (India), Nimoxing.

One of the last two was a strongly built eight foot tall person with a foolish laugh on his face and blank eyes. The other was high nosed deep eyed with crooked hair and a yellow beard; he was a Hu (from northern and western

China) but he was wearing Han clothes. He wore pearls around his neck and jade bracelets on his wrists, a rich air surrounded him. Khubilai introduced them separately. The Han was from Huijiang; his name is Ma Guangzuo. The Hu was a merchant, his family traded treasures in Kaifeng, Cheung An Tai Yuan, his Chinese name was Yin Kexi.

When Nimoxing and Xiaoxiang Zi heard that Jinlun Fawang was the 'First Protector of Mongolia' they examined him coldly, their faces showed disrespect. When they saw the young Yang Guo, they thought that he was Fawang's disciple or grand disciple and didn't even give him another look.

After three rounds of wine, Nimoxing could endure it no longer and said, "Your highness, the lands of Mongolia are vast, this monk is the 'First Protector of Mongolia', his martial arts must be extremely good. I want to experience his skills."

Khubilai gave a subtle smile and didn't reply.

Xiaoxiang Zi followed on, "Brother Nimoxing is from India, Tibetan martial arts originates from India, could there such a thing as getting green from blue in this world? I don't really believe it."

Jinlun Fawang saw Nimoxing's eyes light up; Xiaoxiang Zi's face was exuding a green air; Fawang knew that these two people's internal energy was profound. Yin Kexi was laughing, using all his strength to produce an extremely uncultured and plain air; the more this person tries to show that he is unable, the greater the ability this person is likely to have. Fawang could not take him lightly; but he had no worries about the Han, Ma Guangzuo. He gave a wry laugh and said, "I was given the position of Protector because of

the kindness of the Khan and the Fourth Prince. Originally I did not dare to accept this position.”

Xiaoxiang Zi said, “Then you should give it up for a person more worthy.” He glanced over at Nimoxing as he chuckled wryly.

Jinlun Fawang stretched out his chopsticks and picked up a piece of beef, he laughed, “This is the fattest piece of beef on the plate. I originally didn’t want to eat it but I just happened to stretch out my chopsticks and happened to pick this piece; I just accept it as fate. If you are interested, you can pick it yourself.” He hung the piece of beef over the plate, waiting for each one of them to come and take it.

Ma Guangzuo did not understand the meaning behind Jinlun Fawang’s words; he was talking about a piece of beef, but in reality he was referring to the position of the ‘First Protector of Mongolia’. When Ma Guangzuo saw him offering the piece of beef, he stretched out his chopsticks to catch it. His chopsticks were about to touch the beef when Fawang suddenly swept out one of his chopsticks and lightly touched his chopsticks. Ma Guangzuo felt his arm tremble with great intensity; he couldn’t hold on to them and the pair of chopsticks fell onto the table. Fawang’s chopstick returned in time to keep hold of the piece of beef. The others looked at each other startled.

Ma Guangzuo still did not understand, he picked up the chopsticks and held onto them tightly with his five fingers, he thought, “This time you won’t be able to knock it away...” He stretched his chopsticks towards the piece of beef.

Fawang did the same thing again, sweeping out one chopstick. This time, Ma Guangzuo was holding them tightly, indeed Fawang could not knock them out of his hands but a ‘ka la’ sound was heard, the chopsticks broke

into four pieces as if a knife had sliced through them and two pieces of chopsticks dropped onto the table.

Ma Guangzuo was furious; he called out and threw himself forward to battle Fawang.

Khubilai laughed, "There's no need to get angry warrior Ma, if you want to duel, there's time to do this after we've eaten."

Ma Guangzuo was afraid of his highness; he returned to his seat and pointed to Fawang, shouting, "What witchcraft did you use to break my chopsticks?"

Jinlun Fawang laughed, still holding out the piece of beef in front of him.

At first, Nimoxing did not have any respect for Jinlun Fawang, but after seeing how profound his internal energy was, he did not dare to continue looking down on him. He was an Indian; when he ate he did not use chopsticks, he just stretched out his hand and said, "I want to eat this piece of beef that the big Han couldn't take." His five fingers came out suddenly like a metal claw towards the beef. Fawang swept out his right chopstick, it moved like lightning as he attacked the pressure points on his palm, arm, wrist and the tip of his middle finger.

Nimoxing's palm quickly turned and chopped down at Fawang's wrist. Fawang's arm didn't move, he turned his chopstick around and struck out swiftly again, Nimoxing felt the chopstick striking him on the hand and quickly took his arm back. Fawang's chopstick twisted back into its original position, still holding onto the piece of beef.

His attack of the pressure points were extremely swift; he made many attacks and returned the chopstick into position before the piece of beef slipped away. Yang Guo and the

others could see what had happened. The two had exchange many stances in just a short period of time. Fawang's attacks with the chopstick were indeed fast but Nimoxing's martial arts were also excellent, he was able to take back his hand in an extremely critical situation.

Xiaoxiang Zi called out, "Good skill!"

Khubilai knew that the two were using advanced martial arts to test each other but he couldn't see what type of martial arts they were using. Ma Guangzuo's eyes were wide open; he looked at them, puzzled.

Yin Kexi laughed and said, "Everyone's too polite! You're offering it to the others, but don't want to eat it yourself, nor do you want anybody else to. Everything will be cold by the time you've finished." He then slowly stretched out his chopsticks, the emerald and jade bracelets collided with each other noisily. Before his chopsticks touched the beef, Fawang's chopsticks were forced to tremble slightly by his internal energy; he was getting in the first attack, keeping Fawang's chopsticks in check. Fawang moved his chopsticks forward and allowed him to take the piece of beef. When his internal energy reaches his chopstick, he attacked his arm. Yin Kexi urgently circulated his internal energy and counterattacked. How would he know that Fawang's internal energy would suddenly withdraw? The beef was initially held by him but his internal energy moved it forward and Fawang once again got hold of the piece of beef.

Fawang laughed, "Brother Yin is too polite by offering it to me." This time he used cleverness to win. Yin Kexi fell into the trap and at the same time found out that the opponent's internal energy far exceeded his own. Luckily he hadn't embarrassed himself yet; he gave a wry laugh and picked up a small piece of beef from the plate. He said, "The only

things I love in life are treasures and precious objects, I don't really like fatty meat; I better just eat a small piece." He placed the small piece of beef in his mouth and then slowly chewed.

Jinlun Fawang thought, "This Hu merchant is broad-minded." He turned to Xiaoxiang Zi and said, "Since you offered it to me so modestly, I will accept." He slowly took the chopsticks back half a foot. He guessed that Xiaoxiang Zi's internal energy wasn't weak and so didn't dare to be careless, by taking it back half a foot, if he needed to circulate his internal energy it will be half a foot closer and half a foot further away from his enemy.

Xiaoxiang Zi chuckled and slowly raised his chopsticks; suddenly he sent them forward and caught the piece of beef. He used the force to take it back and he managed to pull it back half a foot.

Jinlun Fawang did not predict that the opponent's movements would be so quick; he quickly circulated his internal energy and pulled back. The piece of beef moved back towards him inch by inch.

Xiaoxiang Zi stood up and placed his left hand on the table. The table made 'ka la' noises under this force but he still could not stop the force that Fawang produced in taking back the piece of beef.

Fawang looked at ease whereas drops of sweat poured from the forehead of Xiaoxiang Zi, the result was clear.

Suddenly a loud call by someone faraway could be heard, "Guo Jing, brother Guo, where are you? Quickly come out Guo Jing, the punk named Guo!"

At first the call came from the east but then it came from the west. There was a distance of a couple of li between the

calls from the east and west and it appeared as if there were two people calling out from the east and west. But the voice was the same and there was no pause between the calls from the east and west. This person's movements were extremely fast and the internal energy behind the calls was profound; this was something that was little seen in the world.

Everyone looked at each other startled. Xiaoxiang Zi loosened his chopsticks and sat back down in his seat.

Jinlun Fawang laughed and said, "Thank you, thank you!" He was about to place the piece of beef in his mouth when suddenly the tent door opened, someone flashed across and stretched out their hand and snatched Fawang's beef and then took a large bite out of it.

This shocked everyone; they all stood up and looked to see who this person was. It was an old man with white hair, a white beard and a smiling red face. He sat down on the rug and started chewing the beef noisily. Jinlun Fawang thought back on the movements of this man when he took his piece of beef; the more he thought about, the more shocked he was.

The guards outside the tent who failed to stop this man all called out, "Stop the assassin!" Four spears were thrust towards the man's chest. The old man stretched out his left hand and grabbed all the spearheads at once; he turned to Yang Guo and said, "Little brother, I'm really hungry, pass over some more beef to me."

The four Mongolian soldiers pushed forward with all their strength but they couldn't move an inch; the four then tried to pull back but again it was to no avail. As they strained with red faces, the spearheads seemed as if they were

trapped under an iron mountain, they were not even able to pull them back half an inch.

Yang Guo thought this guy was entertaining and picked up the plate of beef, he threw it easily to him and said, "Help your self!"

The old man caught it with his right hand and placed it against his chest; suddenly a piece of meat from the plate jumped up and flew into his mouth as if it were alive. This entertained Khubilai, he thought the old man was performing magic and gave out a cheer. But Jinlun Fawang and the others knew that the old man had circulated internal energy through his palm into the plate, forcing the piece of meat upwards.

An ordinary person could force a piece of meat to jump if they tap the plate, but they would definitely knock everything up at once sending the juices everywhere. It would be impossible for them to knock them up piece by piece; the palm power of this old man had reached a stage where he could do as he pleased. Everyone else at the feast knew that they would not be able to do it themselves; fear and respect sprang up in their hearts.

The old man chewed and swallowed; as soon as one piece went down another piece jumped up. In a short while he had completely cleared the plate. His right hand waved out and sent the plate flying out in an arc towards Yang Guo and Yin Kexi. The two of them had already seen how good this man's martial arts were; they were afraid that he had used some kind of strange move in throwing the plate and didn't dare to stretch out their hand to catch it. The two quickly moved out of the way. The plate flew steadily through the air and landed on the table, knocking into a plate of roast lamb. The plate of roast lamb flew towards

the old man while the empty plate stopped dead after a couple of turns.

He had used a stream of “Tai Chi Energy”, according to the continuous intent of Tai Chi. Uninterrupted, if it were shot outwards towards an open space, the plate would circle around. It is not difficult to use this force. There were a fair number of people who were skilled in using the variations of this force, but what was difficult was using the right amount of energy to get the most benefit. Skillfully sending the plate onto the table, stopping the empty plate dead and sending a plateful of food to his hand was such a skill.

The old man laughed out loud extremely proud of himself; he circulated internal energy into his hands and a piece of roast lamb jumped from the plate into his mouth. He finished the plate shortly. The four soldiers that were still in his hands were looking pitiful, they could not take back their spears but they didn't dare to let go. The rules of the Mongolian army were strict; abandoning a weapon in battle was an offence that led to execution. There was that, and the fact that they were responsible for the safety of Khubilai; they could only use all their strength and try to struggle free.

The old man saw that they were at a loss and was becoming more and more pleased. He suddenly shouted, “Change, change, change, two of you kowtow, two of you face the sky! One...two...three!” On three, their arms shook and the spears snapped. The forces from his fingers were directed in two directions, on two of the spears he circulated energy to push away, on the other two he circulated energy to pull. An ‘ai yo’ sound was heard as two soldiers fell and kowtowed and the other two fell backwards facing the sky.

The old man clapped and sang, “Little precious, the harder you fall, the taller you grow!” This was a song that adults

sing to console children after they've fallen.

Yin Kexi suddenly got up and asked, "Senior is named Zhou?"

The old man laughed, "Yep, ha-ha, do you know me?"

Yin Kexi folded his fists and said, "So it's the Old Urchin Zhou Botong, Senior Zhou Lao."

Xiaoxiang Zi had heard of him before but Jinlun Fawang and Nimoxing had not heard of Zhou Botong before. They saw his martial arts were profound but his actions were rather mischievous and childish; indeed, the title 'Old Urchin' is not in vain. Everyone's wariness disappeared slightly as their faces showed a smile.

Jinlun Fawang said, "Forgive me for not knowing this Senior of Wulin. How about a seat? Our highness is eager to meet great people, he will be extremely happy at meeting such an eminent person today."

Khubilai saluted with his hands and said, "That is correct; please have a seat Mr. Zhou."

Zhou Botong shook his head and said, "I'm full, I don't need to eat anymore. Where's Guo Jing, is he around?"

Huang Yaoshi had told Yang Guo about how Zhou Botong and Guo Jing became sworn brothers, immediately he replied coldly, "Why are you looking for him?"

Zhou Botong had always been childlike and loved making acquaintances with young people; he was pleased when he saw that Yang Guo was young and he was even more pleased when he heard him say 'you' and not something like 'Mr. Zhou' or 'old Senior'. He said, "Guo Jing is my sworn brother, do you know him? He loved being around Mongols

ever since he was young; because of this, when I saw this camp I came over to see whether he's here or not."

Yang Guo frowned and said, "Why are you looking for Guo Jing?"

Zhou Botong had no worries, how would he know to conceal his thoughts, he just casually replied, "He sent a letter to me, telling me to attend the 'Heroes Feast'. I had a few games on the road as I rushed from faraway; when I got there I was a couple of days late, the feast had finished, I was damn disappointed."

Yang Guo said, "Didn't he leave a letter for you?"

Zhou Botong eyes rolled over and said, "Why are you asking all the questions? Do you know Guo Jing or not?"

Yang Guo said, "How wouldn't I know them? Mrs. Guo is called Huang Rong, isn't she? Their daughter is called Guo Fu, isn't that right?"

Zhou Botong clapped his hands and said, "Wrong, wrong! That Huang Rong is a little girl herself, what daughter?"

Yang Guo was startled but then immediately understood, he asked, "When was the last time you saw them?"

Zhou Botong counted with his fingers, each finger was counted twice, he said, "At least twenty years."

Yang Guo laughed, "Is she still a little girl after twenty years? Wouldn't she have a child in these twenty years?"

Zhou Botong laughed, his beard fluttering about, he said, "You're right! You're right! Is their daughter pretty?"

Yang Guo said, "Their daughter looks a lot like Mrs. Guo, a little like Guo Jing, just what you'd think."

Zhou Botong laughed, "That's great, if a girl has dense brows and big eyes with a dark oval face like my brother Guo, of course that girl won't be pretty."

Yang Guo knew that he wasn't wary anymore and continued, "Huang Rong's father is Island Master Huang Yaoshi, he and I are great friends, do you know him?"

Zhou Botong was shocked and said, "You little kid, how can you call old 'Heretic' Huang as brother? Who's your Master?"

Yang Guo said, "My Master's abilities are extraordinary, I'm afraid if I tell you that I'll scare you silly."

Zhou Botong laughed, "I can't be scared silly any more." He waved out his right hand and sent the empty plate flying towards him with a tremendous force.

Yang Guo knew that Zhou Botong was the Martial Uncle of Ma Yu and Qiu Chuji and the others. He saw that his arm didn't bend as he threw the plate, he was using his fingers alone; this was a technique of the Quanzhen. He had no fear of Quanzhen martial arts; he stretched out his left index finger and pushed against the bottom of the plate, the plate spun around on his finger. This delighted Zhou Botong whereas Xiaoxiang Zi, Yin Kexi, Nimoxing and the others looked at each other startled.

When Xiaoxiang Zi first saw the young Yang Guo in his ragged clothes, he didn't give him another look but right now he was thinking, "With the force that plate was coming in with, I wouldn't dare to stretch out my hand to catch it never mind just relying on a single finger. If the force used to catch it were just slightly out of place, the plate would snap a wrist. Who exactly is this young man?"

Zhou Botong called out; "Great!" He could see that he was using a Quanzhen technique and asked, "Do you know Ma Yu and Qiu Chuji?"

Yang Guo said, "How wouldn't I know those two old goats?"

Zhou Botong was delighted. Though he didn't have any grudges with Qiu Chuji and the others, he felt that their rules were annoying, they were too prudent; there was some feeling of looking down on them. The person he respects most in his life, apart from his apprentice brother Wang Chongyang, is the carefree Nine Fingered Wondrous Beggar Hong Qigong. He didn't think too much of Huang Yaoshi's heretical nature and Huang Rong's cleverness. When he heard Yang Guo calling Ma Yu and Qiu Chuji 'old goats', it was music to his ears, he asked, "How are Hao Datong and the others?"

Yang Guo's anger erupted as soon as he heard the name 'Hao Datong', he insulted, "That old goat is a damn fool, and one day I'll make him suffer."

Zhou Botong was getting more and more happy as he listened, he asked, "How are you going to make him suffer?"

Yang Guo said, "I'll catch him, tie him up and then let him lie in a cesspit for half a day."

Zhou Botong was delighted and quietly said, "Once you've caught him, don't throw him in the cesspit straight away, first let me know and allow me to take a peek from aside."

He had no ill intent towards Hao Datong, it was just that he loved evil shows; when others are causing trouble and being mischievous; of course he had to join in.

Yang Guo laughed, "Fine, I'll remember to tell you. But why peek? You're afraid of the Quanzhen goats?"

Zhou Botong sighed and said, "I'm Hao Datong's Martial Uncle! If he sees me, he'll naturally call to me for help. It'll be a bit embarrassing if I don't save him but if I do, I won't be able to watch a good show."

Yang Guo thought to himself, "This person's martial arts are excellent and his character is pretty interesting but he's still from Quanzhen and he is the sworn brother of Guo Jing. A man must be ruthless; I need to think of a way to get rid of him."

How would Zhou Botong know that Yang Guo was starting to have ill thoughts about him? He asked, "When are you going to catch Hao Datong?"

Yang Guo said, "I'm about to go. If you want to take in the atmosphere then come along."

Zhou Botong was delighted, he clapped his hands and stood up but suddenly he became depressed and said, "I can't, I need to go to Xiangyang."

Yang Guo said, "What's so much fun in Xiangyang? Just don't go."

Zhou Botong said, "Brother Guo left a letter for me at the Lu Manor; it said that the Mongolian army is invading south and will definitely attack Xiangyang. He's leading the heroes of the central plains to Xiangyang to help, he told me to give a hand as well. I haven't seen him on my travels so I better go to Xiangyang."

Khubilai and Jinlun Fawang looked at each other and both thought, "So the warriors of the central plains have rushed to Xiangyang to protect the city."

Just at this point, the tent opened and in came a monk. He was about forty years old and looked elegant; his expression looked like that of a scholar. He went to Khubilai and the two exchanged whispers. The monk was a Han, his given name Zicong, and was a counsel of Khubilai's. His original name was Liu Kang and he was an official in Xianya and became a monk later on. He was very knowledgeable and did things very thoroughly; Khubilai had a great deal of trust in him. He had received some news from a guard that an important person has arrived in the camp and needs to be received immediately.

Zhou Botong stroked his stomach and said, "Hey monk, move over a little, I'm talking to that little brother. Hey, little brother, what's your name?"

Yang Guo said, "My surname is Yang, first name Guo."

Zhou Botong said, "Who's your Master?"

Yang Guo said, "My Master is a girl, her beauty is unparalleled and her martial arts are excellent, she doesn't allow others to mention her name."

Zhou Botong shivered and remembered his old lover Yinggu; he didn't dare to ask anymore and stood up. He waved his sleeves around to get rid of the dust on his clothes; the tent was filled with dust and dirt as a result.

Zicong could hold on no longer and sneezed twice. Zhou Botong was joyous and waved out with even more strength; suddenly he laughed out loud and said, "I'm going now!" His left hand waved out and the four broken spearheads shot towards Xiaoxiang Zi, Nimoxing, Yin Kexi and Ma Guangzuo. As the spearheads flew through the air, 'wu' 'wu' sounds were made; they were moving extremely quickly and the targets were close; in a flash the spearheads were right before the very eyes of the four.

Xiaoxiang Zi and the others were shocked; they could not dodge out of the way in time and could only circulate their internal energy to catch them. However, when they stretched out their hands to catch them, they caught thin air; a 'pu' sound was heard as the four spearheads flew into the floor.

The spearheads were shot out extremely ingeniously, immediate dispatch and withdrawal, as soon as the spearheads were in front of their eyes, and they suddenly twisted around and shot into the floor.

Ma Guangzuo was a simple minded person and just felt that this was amusing, he laughed out loud and said, "You really have got lots of tricks old man."

But Xiaoxiang Zi and the other two were extremely startled, their faces had changed colour. They all thought about how they missed the spearheads; if the spearhead hadn't changed direction, they would have shot into their stomachs. With the amount of force behind the spearheads, what chance would they have of surviving?" Zhou Botong was extremely proud of himself for making the four of them looking like a fools, he turned around and was about to leave.

Zicong said, "Mr. Zhou, your amazing abilities are rarely seen in this world; I give you a toast on behalf of his highness," He handed a cup of wine to him. Zhou Botong drank it in one go. Zicong sent another cup to him and said, "This one is from me!" Again, Zhou Botong drank it down.

Zicong was about to give another cup to him when suddenly Zhou Botong called out, "Oh no, my stomach hurts, I need to crap." Zhou Botong squatted down and undid his pants, and was about to crap in the tent.

Fawang and the others were amused and all called out for him to stop. Zhou Botong was startled, he called out, "Something's wrong with this stomach ache; I don't need to crap!"

Yang Guo glanced over at Zicong and understood, there was poison in the wine. At the beginning he had some ill intent towards Zhou Botong, wanting to prevent Guo Jing from having a strong ally; but the ill intent he had disappeared immediately. He had no debts and dues with the Old Urchin; he saw that he was childlike and uncomplicated and felt good sentiments towards him. He couldn't endure it when he saw him fall for the dirty trick. He was about to suggest to him to hold Khubilai as a hostage and force Zicong to hand over the antidote when he suddenly heard Zhou Botong call out, "Strange, strange, so its because I drank too little poisonous wine, that's why my stomach ached. Monk, quickly pour me another three cups, the more poisonous the better!"

Everyone looked at each other startled. Zicong was afraid that he would lash out before he died, he didn't dare to go over to him.

Zhou Botong took a large step forward towards the table. Jinlun Fawang stepped in front of Khubilai to protect him; but all he saw was Zhou Botong pulling up his pants with his left hand and reaching for the jug of poisoned wine with his right hand. He then tipped his head backwards and poured all the wine down his throat.

Everyone's face lost its color.

But Zhou Botong laughed and said, "That's better. Now my stomach has got too much poison, won't the Old Urchin turn into the Old Poisonous Animal? I need to fight poison with poison." Suddenly he opened his mouth and shot out a

stream of wine towards Zicong. Jinlun Fawang saw that it was a dangerous situation and quickly picked up a table to block it; an arrow of wine splashed across the table.

Zhou Botong laughed non-stop; he ran to the exit of the tent and suddenly his mischievousness stirred; he grabbed the tent's support pillar and shook a few times. A 'kra ak' sound was heard as the pillar snapped. The tent fell down and covered Khubilai, Jinlun Fawang, Yang Guo and the others inside. Zhou Botong was delighted and got on top of the tent, running back and forth, stepping on everyone inside the tent. Jinlun Fawang sent out a palm and struck the sole of his foot. Zhou Botong felt a great surge of internal energy through his foot and couldn't suppress it, he did a somersault and landed back down, calling out loudly, "Interesting, interesting!" He then left.

Soon, Jinlun Fawang and the others climbed out with Khubilai, and all the guards clamored around to fix the pillar and erect the tent again. Zhou Botong had long gone. Fawang, Xiaoxiang Zi and the others apologized to Khubilai for not protecting him properly and letting him experience this shock. Khubilai didn't punish them one bit and instead praised the abilities of Zhou Botong, saying that it is a great pity that he couldn't make him stay. Fawang and the others had an ashamed expression on their faces.

All the cups and plates were set up once again. Khubilai said, "The Mongolian army has attacked Xiangyang many times before but with no success. This time, the heroes of the central plains have gone there to protect the city; that Zhou Botong has also gone there to help. This is an extremely troublesome situation. I wonder, what great plans do you have?"

Yin Kexi said, "Zhou Botong may have great martial arts but we may not be weaker than him. When your highness

attacks the city, it will be soldier against soldier, general against general; the central plains have their heroes but so does the west."

Khubilai said, "Though your words aren't wrong, there's a saying, 'Before a battle, one must plan for victory in the temple; greater planning will lead to victory whereas little planning will not.' Before I attack, I must have a plan to gain victory."

Zicong said, "Your highness's foresight is magnificent..."

Before he finished, a shout could be heard from outside, someone was calling out, "I said that I don't want to go and I mean it; it's of no use if you beg me or anger me." It was Zhou Botong.

What was he doing back here and who was he talking to? Everyone's curiosity was roused and they wanted to go out to take a look.

Khubilai laughed and said, "Everyone, let's take a look, I wonder who the Old Urchin is arguing with."

Everyone took a step outside the tent and saw four people in an arc far away surrounding Zhou Botong. The four people were standing south, west, northwest and north of him, surrounding him but leaving a way out to the east. Zhou Botong stretched out his arm and threw a fist, he called out, "I'm not going, I'm not going."

Yang Guo was surprised, "If he doesn't want to go, who can force him? Why is there a need for arguing?" He saw that the four people were all wearing a green gown; the colors and clothing looked ancient and wasn't the clothing of the present time. There were three middle-aged men wearing tall hats; standing in the north western position was a girl, her green belt could be seen fluttering in the wind.

The man standing in the northern position said, "We didn't have any intentions in troubling you but you kicked over our pill furnace, ripped our spirit fungus, tore our books, and burned our sword room. You must come back with us and explain everything to our Master; otherwise, when our Master blames someone, none of us disciples will face the punishment."

Zhou Botong put on a smile and said, "Just tell your Master that an old man passed by and accidentally caused all this trouble; won't that be the end of it?"

The man said, "You insist on refusing to come with us?"

Zhou Botong nodded his head. The man pointed to the east and said, "Good, he's here."

Zhou Botong turned around to take a look but didn't see anyone. The man made a sign with his hands and the four of them suddenly pulled open a large net and covered Zhou Botong from his head downwards. The four's hand movements were extremely drilled, and extremely strange; even with Zhou Botong's great abilities he was trapped by the net and had no response, he just bellowed and hollered. The four people swerved around him and tied him up tightly. One of the men put him over his shoulders, the other three held onto their swords, protecting him as they flew to the east.

Yang Guo was worried about Zhou Botong's safety and thought, "I must save him." He then followed after them, calling out, "Hey, hey! Where are you taking him?"

How could Jinlun Fawang and the others not want to know what exactly this strange event is all about? They told Khubilai and followed. After a few li, they arrived at a stream. The four people lifted Zhou Botong onto a boat and two of them started to row. The rest of them followed along

the shore; after a while they saw a boat in the stream and all immediately leapt in. Ma Guangzuo had great strength and he rowed the boat, soon they were just a few tens of feet behind. But the stream was windy and after a few turns, the boat disappeared. Nimoxing leapt from the boat onto a cliff side and climbed up over a hundred feet in a flash like an ape. He saw the boat in the west rowing along an extremely narrow brook. A thicket of trees covered the entrance to this brook, if one didn't look from on high, they would not know that the deep valley would have such a passageway. He leapt back onto the boat and pointed out the directions to them. They quickly turned the boat around and rowed towards the thicket of trees. The entrance was a cave; the ceiling of the cave was only three feet away from the water, and everyone had to lie down before they could row on. After leaving the cave they saw the mountains on either side soared; the sky now looked like a string.

The mountains were green, the water blue, the scenery extremely serene; but it was silent everywhere, exuding a feeling of danger. After another three or four li, the brook suddenly had nine large slabs of stone arising from it, like a shield, blocking the way of the boat.

Ma Guangzuo was the first one to call out, "Damn, there's no way to row past."

Xiaoxiang Zi said in a creepy way, "You've got the strength of a bull, just throw the boat over."

Ma Guangzuo angrily said, "I don't have that kind of strength unless you zombies perform some kind of witchcraft."

Before the two started arguing, Jinlun Fawang was thinking about the situation, "How did the small boat pass this stone shield?" When he heard the words of the two, he said, "No

one can pick up the boat on their own but the six of us together can. Brother Yang, brother Yin and I will be on one side, brother Ni, brother Xiao Xiang and brother Ma will be on the other side, the six of us working together, how about it?"

Everyone agreed and followed his instructions; the six of them stood on two sides and each one found a steady place to stand on the rocks. Luckily the brook was extremely narrow; the boat's width was at arm's length.

Fawang called out, "Lift!" Everyone lifted. Yang Guo's and Yin Kexi's strength was the weakest out of the six but the other four had the strength of many, especially Ma Guangzuo who had divine strength. The boat left the water and passed over the rocks.

Everyone leapt back into the boat; they wiped their palms and laughed. The six of them originally were wary of each other but after working together, naturally they became a bit friendlier.

Xiaoxiang Zi said, "Although the martial arts among us aren't anything spectacular, we could be classed as first rate fighters of Wulin. The six of us lifting a boat isn't really a difficult task but..."

Nimoxing followed on, "The four green people's martial arts are all over the place, could they lift the boat over the rocks?"

Out of the six, five of them were already secretly surprised. Ma Guangzuo was still thinking about what the words 'their martial arts are all over the place' meant.

Nimoxing said, "Their boat is smaller... their numbers are smaller also... The four of them being able to do this... their strength must be... must be incredible."

Yin Kexi said, "There's no need to talk about the three men, that girl was a fragile seventeen or eighteen year old teenager, there is no way she could have such skill, there must be something about those rocks. It's just that we can't see through just yet."

Fawang gave a wry laugh and said, "People cannot be judged on appearances alone. Take a look at our brother Yang, he is of a young age but possesses great martial arts, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, who would have believed it?"

Yang Guo said modestly, "The skills I've learned aren't much, what's good about my martial arts? But the four people in green were able to catch Zhou Botong; they must have some aspect that they excel at." His words were modest but he was now talking to these first rate fighters as brother this and brother that.

Everyone had seen with their own eyes Yang Guo catching a plate thrown by Zhou Botong with a single finger; they did not look lightly on him. They all felt his words were reasonable and all started to make their own guesses about this matter.

Out of the six, Yang Guo was the youngest, Jinlun Fawang, Ma Guangzuo and Nimoxing spent most of their lives in the west; Xiaoxiang Zi spent his time along in the mountains and didn't make acquaintances with anyone. Yin Kexi was the only one who was familiar with the sects, personalities and affairs of the central plains yet he had no clue about who these four people in green were. As they talked, they eventually rowed to the end of the brook. The six of them went ashore and followed the path deep into the valley.

There was only one mountain path so there was no way to go wrong; however the path got steeper and steeper as it

went on and became more and more treacherous. The sky darkened and there wasn't a trace of the people in green.

Just as they were getting anxious, there was firelight from faraway; everyone was pleased and thought, "In a wild valley like this, firelight must mean people; apart from those people in green; no one would live in a place with such dangerous terrain as this."

They then increased their speed. They all knew that they were in a dangerous place and each one heightened their defenses. Each one of them had roamed the world of Jianghu by themselves before and had experienced many dangers; now six great fighters were entering the mountain, who on earth could stop them? Though they were wary, they had no fear.

After a while, they reached a wide level open space at the peak of the mountain. They saw an extremely large flaming bonfire. They walked closer a few hundred feet and by the firelight, they saw a large stone building.

Nimoxing called out loudly, "Hey, hey, some guests have arrived! Come out quickly."

The door of the stone house slowly opened and out came three men and a girl. It was the people in green who had captured Zhou Botong earlier on. The four of them bowed and the leading person asked, "What are our guests' names?"

The one thing that Yin Kexi excels most at is speaking; he laughed and then told them who the other five were. He then said, "My name is Yin Kexi, I am a Hu merchant. Apart from eating, the only thing I know are treasures, I am not like the others who are all highly skilled with martial arts."

The person in green said, "Our residence is in an extremely secluded place, we've never had visitors before, it is our luck that some guests have arrived. But what brought our guests here?"

Yin Kexi laughed, "We saw the four of you catch the Old Urchin Zhou Botong, we were curious so we came along to take a look. Your residence is an extremely elegant and beautiful place, it has opened our eyes; this really wasn't a trip in vain."

The first person in green said, "That old man who messed up our place is named Zhou? He certainly lives up to the name Old Urchin."

The second person in green said, "Are you with him?"

Fawang replied, "We've just met him today, one cannot say that we are friends of his."

The first person in green said, "That Old Urchin charged into our valley and ran riot."

Fawang asked, "What did he do? Did he really rip up your books and set the place on fire?"

The person in green replied, "Only that? I was ordered by my Master to guard the pill furnace; I don't know how the Old Urchin broke into the pill room. He started to talk rubbish with me, saying he was going to tell a story and then telling me to follow him in doing somersaults; he was mad and crazy. The furnace was burning at a critical stage; I couldn't leave and kick him out so I pretended that I didn't hear him. He suddenly kicked out and knocked the furnace and the herbs in it over. I don't know how long it will take to collect all these herbs and medicines again." He looked angry as he said this.

Yang Guo laughed, "He must have blamed you for ignoring him and that it was your fault, right?"

The girl in green said, "Correct. I was in the fungi room when I heard the clamor in the pill room. I knew something was wrong and was about to leave the room to take a look when the old man dashed in. As soon as he stretched out his hand, he snapped the four hundred year old spirit fungus in two."

Yang Guo saw that the young girl was about seventeen or eighteen years of age, her skin was extremely white, very soft and delicate, her eyes bright and clear and there was a very small mole by her mouth. She said, "That Old Urchin is an extremely bothersome troublemaker; that spirit fungus had been grown for over four hundred years, it is an extremely valuable object."

The girl sighed, "My father was going to share it on his wedding day with my step mother but who could have known that it would be ruined by the Old Urchin. My father will of course fly into a rage. After the Old Urchin broke the spirit fungus, he placed it in his pockets and said something about not giving it back to me and laughed. I haven't done anything to offend him. Why on earth did he come here and cause trouble for me?" As she said this, her eyes became red, feeling that she has been wronged.

Yang Guo thought, "The Old Urchin had no reason to bully this girl, this is wrong."

Yin Kexi said, "Please can I have your father's name. We inadvertently came here without permission and don't even know the owner's name; our manners are lacking."

The young girl delayed and didn't reply.

One of the men in green said, "Without our Master's permission, we can not reveal it, please forgive us."

Yang Guo thought, "These people are very secretive; they live here in this secluded place and aren't willing to reveal their identity to others." He then asked, "What happened after the Old Urchin stole the spirit fungus?"

The third person in green said, "The one named Zhou wasn't finished; after wrecking the pill and fungi room, he burst into the library, took a book and started to read. I was assigned to the library and so of course I had to stop him. But he said, 'these are just lies that they tell to children, what's so great about this?' and ripped three books in one go. At that time, senior and second apprentice brother came along with apprentice sister. The four of us together were still unable to stop him."

Fawang gave a wry laugh and said, "That Old Urchin has an eccentric character but his martial arts are really spectacular; of course it would not be easy to stop him."

The second man in green said, "After causing trouble in the pill room, fungi room and library, he went for the sword room. He burst into the room and broke out in a temper, saying that there were... there were too many weapons. They're all over the place and almost cut him. He then set the room alight and burnt all the paintings on the wall. While we urgently tried to put out the fire, he escaped. We all thought that this was a serious matter so we chased after him, caught him and brought him back so our Master can deal with him."

Yang Guo said, "I don't know what punishment the Master of this valley will have for him but I hope that he won't kill him."

The third man in green said, "My Master's wedding is not far away, he won't kill that easily. But if that Old Urchin says

something to offend my Master, then it would be his fault if trouble comes to him."

Yin Kexi laughed, "Why would the Old Urchin deliberately stir up trouble for your Master? He may be mischievous but he doesn't seem to have a bad temper."

The girl in green said, "He said that my father is old and he's still marrying..." The senior apprentice brother suddenly cut her off and said, "That Old Urchin is mad, how believable are his words? Everyone has come from afar and must be hungry; I will serve some food to our guests."

Ma Guangzuo said loudly, "Great, great!" His face lit up.

The four people in green entered the kitchen and brought out some rice and vegetables and then set up a table. There were four basins, one had plain green vegetables, another had white tofu, one of the others was filled with yellow bean sprouts and the last one was filled with black mushrooms. There wasn't any meat.

Just three months after he was born, Ma Guangzuo would not eat anything without meat. He saw four trays of vegetables in front of him that didn't even have a drop of oil on them, he was extremely disappointed.

The first person in green said, "We do not eat meat here in the valley, forgive us. Please eat." He then bought out a jug and poured out a clear and clean liquid in the bowls in front of them.

Ma Guangzuo thought, "Since there's no meat, I better drink a few bowls of wine." He picked up the bowl and drank, he noticed that it had no taste and it was actually water, he roared, "This Master is damn stingy; there isn't even a drop of wine for us."

The first person in green said, "Our valley forbids alcohol; this is a rule passed down by our ancestors; please forgive us."

The girl in green said, "We have seen the words 'beautiful wine' in books, but we've never experienced what this beautiful wine is. The books say that wine harms the mind, it appears that it isn't anything good."

Fawang, Yin Kexi and the others saw that these four people weren't old but their actions and words were reserved and trite. Ever since they've spoken with these people, they haven't showed a single smile; though their faces weren't hateful, it wasn't interesting to talk to them. In other words, they didn't speak more than half a word to each other; they stopped talking and lowered their heads as they ate. The four people retreated and didn't come forward again.

After they ate, Ma Guangzuo said that they should leave in the night. But the other five saw that there was something about this place, they were curious and wanted to understand it more clearly.

Yin Kexi said, "Brother Ma, since we're here, we need to meet the Master of this valley tomorrow; how could we just leave?"

Ma Guangzuo roared, "There's no meat or wine, isn't he trying to torture us? I can't live half a day like this."

Xiaoxiang Zi said, "The majority of us are staying; why are you trying to start something?"

Ma Guangzuo has been secretly afraid of his zombie appearance; when he heard him say this, he didn't dare to speak another word.

That night the six of them slept in the stone building on some straw mats on the floor. They felt that this valley was passionless; even stupidly stricter and more prudish than a Buddhist temple. Though the monks of Buddhist temples are vegetarians, they wouldn't treat people so coldly; these people didn't even show half a smile. Yang Guo was used to living in the Ancient Tomb and used to living with the icy cold Xiao Longnu. He was the only one who didn't think anything of this.

Nimoxing said enraged, "The Old Urchin wrecked and set the building alight, that is something!" When he said this, Ma Guangzuo felt the same way and called out loudly in response.

Nimoxing said, "Brother Jinlun, you're our brains, what kind of person do you think the Master of this valley is? Is he a bad guy or a good guy? Are we going to be polite to him or are we going to beat the... beat the crap out of him."

Fawang said, "I'm like all you people here when it comes to trying to fathom what type of person this Valley Master is, it is difficult for us to guess. Tomorrow, we'll just act accordingly."

Yin Kexi said quietly, "The martial arts of the four green disciples of this valley aren't weak, so naturally there will be even better martial artists in this valley. Everyone needs to be careful, just one little slip up and the six of us might die here, that wouldn't be so good."

Ma Guangzuo was still complaining about the food and didn't listen to what Yin Kexi was saying.

Yang Guo said, "If you're not careful tomorrow, you'll be caught and trapped here for the rest of your life; you'll be fed water and rice, vegetables and tofu everyday. When that

happens, I'm afraid that even the tapeworm in your stomach would want to die."

Ma Guangzuo was frightened and quickly said, "Good brother, I'll listen...I'll listen."

That night they didn't sleep too peacefully as they thought about the danger they were in; only Ma Guangzuo slept well, snoring thunderously and calling out in his dreams, "Come, come! Cheers! This slab of beef is massive!"

End of Chapter 16.

Chapter 17 - The Secluded Passionless Valley

Translated by Noodles



*Fan Yi Weng quickly moved his head to the left.
The opponent's attack was fast, his reaction was*

also very swift and his beard followed him and flung upwards. Yang Guo's scissors had been opened and was guarding the right; a 'ka' sound was heard as the scissors cut down. He cut off over two feet of the beard.

After Yang Guo woke up the next morning, he left the stone house and went outside. Last night it was dark and he couldn't see the surroundings clearly but now he could; he was surrounded by emerald green grass, the flowers like a brocade, the scenery of this place was already magnificent but the beauty of this place was even more rarely seen.

He followed where his feet took him and along the path he saw cranes, herds of white deer, squirrels and rabbits but none of them were alarmed by his presence.

He passed two bends and saw the girl in green plucking flowers off to one side. She saw him approaching and greeted, "You wake up really early, have some breakfast." She plucked two flowers from the tree and offered them to him.

Yang Guo accepted them and thought, "Is it possible that flowers can be eaten?" But then he saw the girl tearing the flower petal by petal and placing them in her mouth, he did the same. When he placed the petals in his mouth, he noticed a sweet fragrance, a fragrance like that of honey and there was a subtle air of wine, he felt a feeling of comfort but after a few chews the taste became bitter and sour. He wanted to spit it out but felt that he couldn't give it up; he wanted to swallow but had a little difficulty in getting it go down his throat.

He carefully looked at the plant and saw that the branches were covered in thorns but the flowers were extremely

beautiful, and even more fragrant than lotuses, he asked, "What is this flower? I've never seen it before."

The girl said, "This is the Passion Flower, I've heard that it is a very rare plant. Tell me, what do you think of the taste?"

Yang Guo said, "At first, it is extremely sweet but afterwards it is extremely bitter. This is called the Passion Flower? There's a meaning behind this name." He stretched out his hand to pluck a flower.

The girl said, "Careful! There's thorns on the plant, don't touch it!"

Yang Guo avoided the thorns and was very careful but he didn't notice that behind the flower was hidden another and it pricked his hand.

The girl said, "This valley is called the 'Passionless Valley' yet there are so many Passion Flowers growing here."

Yang Guo said, "Why is it called the Passionless Valley? This name really is... really is special."

The girl shook her head and said, "I don't know why. This is the name our ancestors gave it, maybe my father knows."

The two then started to walk down the path, shoulder to shoulder. The scent of flowers filled Yang Guo's nose, by the side of the path were rabbits and young deer were darting about, it was very adorable sight. He had a feeling of being carefree and joyous, and naturally he started to think about Xiao Longnu, "If the person walking with me was Gu Gu, I really would love to live in this place forever with her and not ever leave." Just as he thought about this, the wound on his finger suddenly became painful, the wound was very small yet the pain was so great, it was like someone smashing a hammer across his chest, he couldn't hold it in

and gave an 'ai' call, placed the finger in his mouth and sucked it.

The girl blandly said, "You're thinking about your lover, is that it?"

Yang Guo's thoughts were guessed; his face went red and asked, "How do you know?"

The girl said, "If you've been pricked by the thorns of the Passion Flower, you cannot think about love for the next twenty four hours otherwise the suffering will be unbearable."

Yang Guo was surprised and said, "There's actually such a strange thing as this in the world?"

The girl said, "My father said: love is like this, when it enters the mouth it is sweet but afterwards it becomes bitter and sour, furthermore, it is covered by thorns, even if you are extremely careful, pain from it would be unavoidable. The flower was given its name most probably because it has this special characteristic."

Yang Guo asked, "How come that within twenty four hours, one cannot... cannot... think about love?"

The girl said, "Father said: there's poison on the thorns of the plant. When people think about love, not only does their blood flow quicker, some unknown thing is created in the blood. The poison of the thorns of the Passion Flower is not harmful normally, but once it meets this something in the blood, it will create unbearable pain in the person."

When Yang Guo heard this, he felt that it was fairly reasonable and believed her with few doubts.

The two slowly walked to the unsheltered mountainside. The light of the sun lighted up this place, the ground and

air were gentle and warm; the Passion Flowers have bloomed early here and there were fruits on the plant.

Yang Guo saw that the fruits were either red or green, but some were red and green and there were hair on the fruits, like a caterpillar.

Yang Guo said, "The Passion Flower is so beautiful yet its fruits are so ugly."

The girl said, "The fruits of the flower can't be eaten, some are sour, some are hot and some stink so much that it makes people want to vomit."

Yang Guo gave a laugh and said, "Is it possible that there aren't any that are sweet as honey?"

The girl glanced at him and said, "Sometimes there are but you cannot tell by its appearance. Some that are extremely ugly are sweet but an ugly fruit doesn't necessarily mean it will be a sweet one. Only by tasting it directly will you know for sure. Out of ten fruits, nine are bitter; because of this we never eat them."

Yang Guo thought, "Though she is talking about the Passion Flower, it is like an analogy for love. Could it be that although the love between lovers is at first sweet, it will eventually turn sour? Can it be that a pair of lovers who are deeply in love with each other will eventually experience more bitterness than sweetness? Could it be that the yearning love I have for Gu Gu will eventually..."

As soon as he thought about Xiao Longnu, his finger suddenly broke out with a piercing pain again and he swung his arm around a few times. He now knew that the words of the girl were indeed true.

When the girl saw him like this, her lip moved a little, as if she wanted to laugh but was refraining from doing so. Sunlight lit up her face and showed a pair of elegant eyes and brows, her skin was white with redness floating on top of it, she looked very beautiful.

Yang Guo laughed, "I once heard a story; there was once an emperor, he set up a fire display and burned all things, throwing away most of his kingdom as a result, and the only reason for this was that he was trying to get a legendary beauty to smile. To be able to see a smile is a fortunate thing, so, the same applies whether it's in the past or in the present."

After being teased by Yang Guo, the girl could no longer hold it in and eventually gave a giggle.

Yang Guo noticed that she had been cold as ice throughout this time and there were some feelings of anxiety in his heart, but after this smile, most of the divide between the two went away. Yang Guo continued, "Everyone knows that a beauty's smile is rare to come by, they say something like a smile can overturn a city, another can overturn a country, actually there's something of a beauty's that is even rarer than a smile."

The girl's eyes opened wide and asked, "What?"

Yang Guo said, "A beautiful girl's name. To have the opportunity to come across a beautiful woman is an extremely lucky event, to be able to see the smile of a beautiful girl would be because of the good deeds of their ancestors and one must go through three lifetimes..." Before he finished the girl giggled again.

Yang Guo continued looking serious and said, "To be able to hear a beautiful girl reveal her name that really requires eighteen generations of great deeds."

The girl said, "I'm not some beautiful girl; no one in the valley has ever called me beautiful, why must you joke?"

Yang Guo sighed and said, "No wonder this place is called the Passionless Valley. But in my opinion, the name should be changed to something else."

The girl said, "Change to what?"

Yang Guo said, "It should be called Blind Man's Valley."

The girl asked surprised, "Why?"

Yang Guo said, "Look at how beautiful you are but none of them praise you; aren't the people who live in this valley blind?"

The girl laughed again. Her beauty could be classed as first class but compared to Xiao Longnu's; there were still many li between them. Compared to the gentleness of Cheng Ying and the prettiness of Lu Wushuang, she appeared to be slightly inferior. But she was elegant, graceful and there was a wholesome air about her. No one had praised her beauty before, and this was because the martial arts her valley practiced revolved around abdication. When her fellow apprentices see each other they are always cold and remain unmoved. In the hearts of her fellow apprentices though, they did think that she was very beautiful but none of them dared to say it out loud.

Today she suddenly met Yang Guo. This person's character was dynamic and spirited, the stricter and more restrained she acts, the greater the urge he has to make her get rid of this unfeeling appearance. The girl was pleased with these words and laughed, "I'm afraid that you're the blind man, calling this ugly girl a beautiful girl."

Yang Guo put on a serious face and said, "You never know, my eyes could be wrong. However if you want this valley to remain peaceful and quiet then you can't smile."

The girl asked surprised, "Why?"

Yang Guo said, "There's an old saying: 'a smile can overturn a city, another can overturn a country', that saying really ought to be changed. It shouldn't be country; it should be changed to valley."

The girl bowed subtly and laughed, "Thank you, can you stop teasing me please?"

Yang Guo saw her fine, elegant waist and trembled slightly, his heart was moved. Although it wasn't an intense feeling, his finger suddenly broke out in a severe pain again.

When the girl saw him waving his finger about, she felt slightly displeased and said angrily, "I'm talking to you right now yet you're thinking about your lover."

Yang Guo said, "I'm innocent, I'm innocent, it's because of you that my finger hurts and here you are blaming me." The girl blushed and suddenly ran away.

Yang Guo immediately regretted his words as soon as he said them, thinking, "My heart belongs to Gu Gu yet why haven't I changed this type of behavior? Yang Guo ah Yang Guo you little bastard, don't talk such rubbish again." He inherited some of his father's scoundrel's attitude and ungentlemanly behavior. Every time he met a girl he would tease and flirt with them, causing them to fall for him as a result. Although he didn't have any ill intentions, it was something that made him feel joy in his heart.

The girl ran for a few tens of feet and suddenly stopped below a Passion Flower tree and hung her head deep in

thought, after a little while she turned to him and said, "If an ugly girl tells you her name, it must be because your ancestors have done bad deeds for eighteen generations and the bad karma has passed down onto you."

Yang Guo went over to her and laughed, "Of all the things to be born with, you were born with the love of saying negative things. My ancestors for the last eighteen generations have done many good deeds; some of the good karma should be reaped by me." His words were again praising her beauty.

Her face went slightly red and quietly said, "I'll tell you but you cannot tell another and I forbid you to call my name in front of others."

Yang Guo stuck out his tongue and said, "Oh sweet beauty, aren't I afraid of not having any descendants?"

The girl showed another smile and said, "My father's surname is Gongsun..." She still did not want to reveal her name and wanted to go around in circles.

Yang Guo interrupted, "But what is Miss's name?"

The girl smiled and said, "My father gave his only daughter the name Lu'E."

Yang Guo praised her, "The name is as beautiful as the owner."

After Gongsun Lu'E told Yang Guo her name, she felt closer to him and said, "When father invites you to see him, you mustn't smile at me."

Yang Guo said, "What happens if I smile."

The girl sighed and said, "If father knows that I smiled at you and told you my name, I really don't know how father

would punish me.”

Yang Guo said, “I’ve never heard of such a strict father, not even allowing his daughter to smile at someone. He has a beautiful daughter, could it be that he doesn’t love you?”

When Gongsun Lu’E heard these words her eyes went red and said, “My father used to love me very much but after my mother died when I was six, he treated me stricter and stricter. After he marries again, I wonder how he will treat me?” Two drops of tears rolled down her cheeks as she said this.

Yang Guo comforted her, “After your father marries he will be happy, he’ll definitely treat you better then.”

Gongsun Lu’E shook her head and said, “I rather he treats me even stricter than marry another wife again.”

Yang Guo’s parents died when he was young so he didn’t know much about these types of feelings; he wanted to make her happy and said, “Your new mother’s definitely not as half as beautiful as you.”

Gongsun Lu’E quickly said, “You’re wrong, my new mother is a true beauty. Because of her my father... my father... Yesterday we caught that old man named Zhou but my father was busy with organizing the wedding, otherwise he would never have allowed that Old Urchin to escape again.”

Yang Guo was shocked and pleased, he asked, “That Old Urchin escaped again?”

Lu’E frowned slightly and said, “Didn’t you hear me?”

The two spoke for a while and the sun gradually rose up in the sky. Lu’E suddenly realized something and said, “Quickly go back, don’t let my fellow apprentices see us together talking, they’ll tell my father.”

Yang Guo pitied her situation and stretched out his left hand to hold her hand and patted her on the back with his right, consoling her.

Gongsun Lu'E's eyes showed that this touched her, she lowered her head and suddenly her face went red.

Yang Guo was afraid that his thoughts would lead to Xiao Longnu again and cause his finger to break out in a severe pain again, he quickly rushed back to the stone house that he was staying in.

Before he even got back to the stone house he could hear the bellows of Ma Guangzou, complaining how his stomach can't survive on water and vegetables and how could these sweet and bitter flower petals be eaten. Are they trying to kill me?

Yin Kexi laughed, "Brother Ma, you better hide all the valuables that you have; I think the Master of the valley has ill intent."

Ma Guangzou didn't know he was being ridiculed and nodded his head in agreement.

Yang Guo returned to the room and saw a few dishes filled with the petals of the Passion Flower on the table. He watched them eat the petals with squinting faces and he was amused as he thought about how even Jinlun Fawang the monk was affected by effects of the passion flower.

He picked a cup of water and took two sips when he heard footsteps approaching, a man in green came in, bowed to them and said, "Our Master will now see his guests."

Fawang, Nimoxing and the others were all great Masters, no matter where they went, the Master of that place would come out and personally greet them; even Mongolia's

Fourth Prince Khubilai showed great respect to them. They could never have thought that the Master of this secluded valley would be so impudent, they all were angry and thought, "When I see that rude Valley Master I'm going to show him a thing or two."

The six of them followed the man in green for a li or so and suddenly came across a swaying green bamboo forest. Bamboo was rare in the north and such a large piece of bamboo forest was even rarer. In the middle of the forest, the light fragrant relaxing scent of flowers could be noticed. As soon as they passed through the forest, the scent suddenly became overwhelming; everywhere in front of them were Chinese narcissi. A shallow pond with a depth that was less than a foot was filled with the flowers. These flowers were also something that was usually seen in the south, why could they be found here in this mountain valley?

Fawang thought, "There must be some hot springs below the mountain that keeps the ground and air warm."

Every five feet or so was a Mu Chun plant, the man in green darted across the pond over them. The six followed but Ma Guangzou was heavy and had poor lightness kung fu; though his footsteps were large they weren't large enough to take steps of five feet or so. After stepping on a few plants, he decided to drop into the pond and follow them by wading instead.

They followed a green stone path and from afar, they saw a large stone building built under the cover of the mountains. The seven advanced towards it. Outside the building were two young attendants who were holding a fly whisk in their hands. One of the attendants went inside the house to tell the Master of their arrival while the other opened the door to receive them.

Yang Guo thought, "I wonder whether the Valley Master will come and receive us in person?" Before his thoughts were settled, a bearded old man in green came out of the house.

This old man was extremely short, no more than four feet tall, his appearance was strange but the strangest thing about him was his exceedingly long thick beard that hung down to the ground. He was wearing a dark green gown and had a green rope tied across his waist.

Yang Guo thought, "This Valley Master looks so weird yet his daughter is so beautiful."

The old man bowed deeply to him and said, "It is our luck to have such prestigious guests, please come in for tea."

When Ma Guangzou heard the word 'tea', he frowned deeply and said loudly, "Drink tea! What place doesn't have tea? Why must I come to this place for it?"

The long bearded old man did not know what he meant; he glanced at him and then bowed again receiving the guests.

Nimoxing thought, "I'm a short man but the Master of this valley is even shorter. You win on shortness but let's see who wins on martial arts." He barged forward to the front, stretched out his hand and said, "Nice to meet you." He took the old man's hand and immediately used the strength in his hands.

The others took a couple of steps back when they saw the two stretching out their hands to receive each other, they knew that when two great Martial artists exchange forces, it will be something out of the ordinary.

Nimoxing first used twenty percent of his power in his hands but he found that the opponent did not counterattack nor block; he was slightly surprised and increased another

twenty percent. He felt that it was like holding a slab of solid wood. He increased another twenty percent of the force in his hands. A faint green air glimmered across the old man's face and his hand was still like a rigid piece of wood.

Nimoxing was extremely surprised and didn't dare to use the rest of his strength just in case the enemy counterattacked when he was at full strength, then, he would not be able to defend against the attack. He laughed and released his hand.

Jinlun Fawang was second in line. He saw what had happened and knew that Nimoxing was unable to ascertain the short man's abilities. There was no need for him to make a rash move while the opponent's abilities were still unclear, Fawang folded his arms and gracefully walked past. Xiaoxiang Zi and Yin Kexi followed together with Ma Guangzou behind. Ma Guangzou had seen the short man's beard and thought that it was extremely weird. He hadn't eaten anything except the Passion Flowers and that made him even hungrier; at this moment in time he was hungry and angry. When he entered he suddenly stuck out his foot and stepped on the tip of the man's beard.

The old man was unmoved and said, "Please be careful."

Ma Guangzou put his other foot on the beard and said, "What?"

The old man moved his head slightly and Ma Guangzou suddenly flipped over. Such a large person falling to the floor is no ordinary matter.

Yang Guo was the last one to enter; he quickly dashed forward two steps and struck Ma Guangzou on the backside moving his gigantic body forwards. Ma Guangzou stood firmly on the ground and rubbed his backside.

The old man acted as if he didn't see anything; he invited them into hall and sat them on the west side before saying clearly, "The guests have arrived, call for the Valley Master."

Yang Guo and the others were shocked, "So that old man is not the Valley Master."

From the back of the hall, ten or so green clothed disciples came in and stood to the left, Gongsun Lu'E was amongst them. After a while, a person entered the hall and bowed to the six and casually sat down on a chair on the east side. The long bearded old man stood by his chair. From the man's presence, this person will be none other but the Valley Master.

This man was about forty five or six years of age, he had a handsome face and appeared graceful; from the way he greeted them and sat down, he also seems to possess a lofty air. His face was yellow and dried, not looking like someone who possessed great martial arts. As soon as he sat down; some of the disciples in green brought tea forward. The hall was decorated in green, but the Valley Master was wearing a precious satin blue gown, he was extremely eye catching in the deluge of green.

The Valley Master picked up a tea bowl and said, "Please have some tea."

Ma Guangzou took a look at the bowl of tea, he saw that it was cold and had a few tea leaves floating on top; it was extremely bland to him and he snapped, "Valley Master, you don't eat meat and you don't even drink tea, no wonder you look ill."

The Valley Master did not move a muscle. He took a sip of his tea and said, "The people of our valley have been vegetarians for hundreds of years."

Ma Guangzou said, "What's so good about being vegetarian. Does it make you live longer without aging?"

The Valley Master said, "My ancestors have lived here since the Tang dynasty; since then, none of the descendants has ever dared to break the vegetarian code."

Jinlun Fawang folded his arms and said, "So this place was set up in the Tang dynasty and has lasted until now, that really is something."

The Valley Master folded his arms and said, "You're too kind."

Xiaoxiang Zi suddenly spoke in a strange way, "Did your ancestors ever see Royal Concubine Yang?" His tone was extremely peculiar.

Nimoxing, Yin Kexi and the others were familiar with his voice after spending time with him, they were surprised when they heard this voice and all turned towards him. They were even more shocked when they saw his face, it had somehow has completely changed, his face had the appearance of a zombie before but now it looked even odder.

Fawang, Nimoxing and the others were slightly worried, "So this person possesses such great internal energy, even his face changes. He's circulating his internal energy so he can immediately strike out; does he want to show the Valley Master a thing or two?" They all put their guards up when they thought about this.

The Valley Master replied, "My ancestors did work in the Tang court as officials, when they saw what state the court had falling into under Yang Guozhong, they were furious and left to reside in a secluded place."

Xiaoxiang Zi laughed, "Your ancestors must have drunk the water that Royal Concubine Yang had washed her feet with."

Everyone's face in the hall changed as soon as these words came out. It was a challenge to the Valley Master and he was going to make his move very soon.

Fawang and the others were surprised, thinking, "This Xiaoxiang Zi is extremely crafty, he always lets other people go first in all matters, why has he volunteered to go first suddenly?"

The Valley Master ignored him and signaled to the old long bearded man. The old bearded man said clearly, "Our Master has treated you with respect as guests, how can you say such things?"

Xiaoxiang Zi laughed and said in his strange manner, "Your ancestor has definitely drunk the foot water of Royal Concubine Yang; if they haven't drunk it, I'll cut off my head for you."

Ma Guangzou was surprised and asked, "Brother Xiaoxiang, how do you know? Could it be that you drank some that day as well?"

Xiaoxiang Zi laughed, his voice changed again as he said, "If they didn't drink the foot water and upset their stomachs, what other reason is there for them not to eat meat?"

Ma Guangzou clapped and laughed, he called out, "Yes, yes, it must be for this reason."

But Fawang and the others frowned, they all felt that Xiaoxiang Zi's words were going a bit too far; everyone has their own eating habits, how can you use it as a joke? Not mentioning the fact that the six of them were deep in this

valley, the people of this valley were definitely not kind people; even if fists had to be raised, a backup plan should be made first.

The old bearded man could endure this no longer; he went to the middle of the hall and said, "Mr. Xiaoxiang Zi, our valley has not offended you. If you're looking for a fight then please come forward."

Xiaoxiang Zi said, "Good!" He remained in his chair and leapt over the table in front of him; after a 'deng' sound, he landed in the middle of the hall in his chair. He called out, "Long bearded old man, what's your name? It'll be unfair if we fight with me not knowing your name but you knowing mine. I cannot afford to be in this predicament."

His words seemed sound but unsound at the same time; the old man became even angrier but his wariness also deepened after seeing how graceful Xiaoxiang Zi was in moving the chair into the centre of the room, he wasn't anything ordinary.

The Valley Master said, "Tell him, it's not important."

The old man said, "Fine, my surname is Fan, first names Yiweng, please stand up and start."

Xiaoxiang Zi said, "What weapon are you going to use? Go get it and let me take a look."

Fan Yiweng said, "You want to compete with weapons? That's good." His right foot stamped on the floor and he called out, "Bring it!"

Two attendants rushed inside and when they came out, they had an eleven foot long steel Dragon Head Staff on their shoulders.

Yang Guo and the others were shocked when they saw this, "How can this short man use such a long and heavy weapon."

Xiaoxiang Zi didn't take any notice and took out an extremely large pair of scissors from underneath his gown. He said, "Do you know what this pair of scissors is used for?"

When the others saw this weapon, they just felt that it was a strange weapon, but Yang Guo was shocked. He didn't stretch out his hand towards his bag, but instead he just straightened his back a little and noticed that his pair of scissors was missing. He thought, "Blacksmith Feng made that large pair of scissors for me that I had intended to use against Li Mochou. How did that zombie steal it off me in the middle of the night without me noticing?"

Fan Yiweng took his staff and placed it on the floor. The hall was extremely spacious; as soon as the staff landed, it produced 'weng' 'weng' noises and along with the echoes from the room, the noise was tremendous.

Xiaoxiang Zi lifted up the scissors with his right hand and opened them. He held the scissors with all the strength in his fingers. He called out, "Hey, shortie, you don't know the name of my precious scissors, do you want me to tell you?"

Fan Yiweng angrily said, "Such an unorthodox weapon won't have an elegant name."

Xiaoxiang Zi laughed and said, "Correct, the name is not elegant, it is called the Dog Fur Scissors."

Yang Guo was not pleased, "Who wants you to give my pair of scissors such an ugly name."

He heard Xiaoxiang Zi continue, "I knew long ago that there was a long bearded creature around here; because of this I prepared this pair of Dog Fur Scissors so I can cut off your beard!"

Nimoxing and Ma Guangzou burst out laughing, Yin Kexi and Yang Guo too couldn't hold in their laughter and laughed; only Jinlun Fawang kept his self-control and along with the Valley Master, the two appeared as if nothing had happened.

Fan Yiweng swung his staff a little and created a gust of wind, he said, "I was thinking my beard is too long, since you want to be a barber and help me trim it, nothing could be better, let's fight!"

Xiaoxiang Zi lifted his head and looked up at the beam of the hall in thought, it appeared that he didn't hear his words. Suddenly, his right arm came out like lightning and the scissors cut towards the man's beard.

Fan Yiweng would never have dreamed he would actually attack while sitting in the chair; he had no time to dodge and urgently dropped his staff down. His body lifted up and somersaulted through the air about ten feet off the floor with the staff still on the floor.

Xiaoxiang Zi's attack was extremely quick and Fan Yiweng's dodge was also very swift; in that cut and dodge, the two skilled martial artists had displayed their advanced martial arts. But Fan Yiweng still suffered by that attack; though he managed to avoid that cut, three strands of his beard were cut off by the tip of the scissors.

Xiaoxiang Zi was extremely proud of himself. He picked up the three strands of beard with his left hand and blew the strands of hair which flew towards his bowl of tea on the

table. A 'ping pang' sound was heard as the bowl fell onto the floor and shattered.

Yang Guo and the others knew that he was putting on a show and that it was his breath that forced the bowl to drop on the floor. But Ma Guangzou did not know this and thought that the strands of beard had great power after being blown by Xiaoxiang Zi. He called out loudly, "Xiaoxiang Zi, your strands of beard are really something!"

Xiaoxiang Zi laughed, he opened and closed the scissors then called out, "Short beard, do you want to test out my Dog Fur Scissors again?"

Though everyone could see that he was laughing, his face remained unmoved; they were becoming more and more shocked by him. They were thinking, "When someone reaches an advanced state in their internal energy, they can be angry and delighted without showing it on their faces, even to the point where the face looked emotionless. But it is unheard of that someone can laugh so heartily but keep that fearful face." His face was too unsightly for the eyes; everyone just took one look and immediately turned away again.

Fan Yiweng was now furious after being ridiculed again and again; he bowed to the Valley Master and said, "Master, today this disciple cannot continue treating the guests with respect."

Yang Guo was extremely surprised, "That short man is a lot older than the Valley Master; how can he call him Master?"

The Valley Master nodded his head slightly and gently waved out his left hand.

Fan Yiweng swept out his staff towards the chair that Xiaoxiang Zi was sitting on; though he was a short man he

possessed incredible strength, the hundred kilo (220 lb) staff swept out and created a great gust of wind.

Though Yang Guo and the others were on the same side as Xiaoxiang Zi, they did not know exactly how skilled he was. They all watched the men battle with great concentration.

The staff was now half a foot away from the leg of the chair. Xiaoxiang Zi lowered his left hand and actually stretched it out to grab the head of the staff and at the same time, he cut forward towards his opponent's beard with the scissors.

Fan Yiweng was extremely angry, he thought, "You actually dare to look down on me like this!" He swung his head to the side and his beard moved to the side while the staff continued its sweep and struck Xiaoxiang Zi's palm.

The others called out and stood up; they all thought that Xiaoxiang Zi's palm would have suffered a serious injury.

But Fan Yiweng felt as if his staff had struck water, soft as if nothing was there; he knew something was wrong and quickly pulled back. However, Xiaoxiang Zi's twisted his wrist and kept his hold on the staff.

Fan Yiweng felt his opponent immediately pushing outward so he immediately sent the staff forward. The force he applied was ferocious; he assumed that Xiaoxiang Zi would have to leave his seat but he didn't predict that the opponent would again leap away with his chair, this time to the left as the staff thrust towards thin air. He had no choice but to release his grip on the head of the staff.

Fan Yiweng's left hand twisted above his head and the staff made a circle and was sent towards his opponent's head.

Xiaoxiang Zi wanted to ridicule him and leapt up about ten feet with the chair and actually passed over the staff.

The others saw that his hands techniques were extraordinary and swift; though he was in the chair, he moved as if he was not, they all called out in appreciation.

Fan Yiweng saw that his opponent was highly skilled; he poured all his concentration into this battle, the staff created gusts of wind as he moved it around. He knew that hitting him would not be easy but if he smashes his chair, he will be able to get the initiative.

But Xiaoxiang Zi's martial arts were extraordinary; his right hand continued to open and close the scissors and suddenly cut towards his beard while Xiaoxiang Zi's left hand used the "Trapping Hand Technique" to snatch his staff.

In the blink of an eye the two had tens of exchanges; though they appeared to be equal, Xiaoxiang Zi had not left his chair, not giving an ounce of respect towards his opponent.

Jinlun Fawang was shocked inside, "Who would have thought that zombie would actually possess such great abilities?"

More exchanges passed between the two; Fan Yiweng kept on using sweeping stances across the floor, while Xiaoxiang Zi kept on leaping up in the chair, getting quicker and quicker.

The Valley Master suddenly called out, "Don't hit the chair, otherwise you can't handle him."

Fan Yiweng was startled but then immediately understood, "While he's sitting in the chair, I can only fight him to a draw. If his legs were on the ground, then my beard will be cut off in just a few stances." He suddenly changed his stances and urgently waved and twisted the staff around. A circle of silver light covered the short man in green while

on the outside there was a zombie like person leaping up and down without stopping. This was a strange rarely seen spectacle.

The Valley Master knew that Xiaoxiang Zi was deliberately trying to make a fool out of Fan Yiweng; if it continued he would definitely suffer. The Valley Master then stood up and slowly left the table. He said, "Yiweng, you are not a match for that Master, come back."

Fan Yiweng obeyed his Master and said loudly, "Yes!" He straightened his staff and was about to take it back when Xiaoxiang Zi called out, "That won't do, that won't do!" He flew up from the chair and threw himself down onto the staff. A 'ka la' sound was heard as the staff smashed the chair into pieces; but the staff was held onto by Xiaoxiang Zi with his left hand. Xiaoxiang Zi steadied his left leg and opened the scissors. Fan Yiweng's beard was hanging between the blades, a cut now and his beard would be gone.

Who knew that the long beard that Fan Yiweng grew was an extremely soft lethal weapon; the technique for using it is along the same lines as a whip, a chain and a whisk. His head moved slightly and the beard whipped around escaping from the blade of the scissors and wrapped up the scissors instead; he moved his head backwards and a great force pulled the scissors forward.

Xiaoxiang Zi called out loudly, "Ai yo, old shortie, your beard is pretty powerful; Xiaoxiang Zi is in awe of you." One had his beard wrapped around the scissors whereas the other had his hand holding onto the staff, there was no result for the time being.

Xiaoxiang Zi laughed out loud and said, "Interesting, interesting!"

Suddenly a grey blur flashed in from the front door; this person was extremely quick and was pushing both his palms forward towards the back of Xiaoxiang Zi.

The Valley Master shouted, "Who is it?"

This attack was quick and vicious and it was certain to hit its target. Xiaoxiang Zi released his grasp of the staff and turned his left palm around and pushed out at the opponent below the elbow, immediately dispersing the power of his palms.

The person angrily said, "You bastard, I'm going to kill you!"

Yang Guo and the others were incredibly surprised when they saw this person; they all called out, "Xiaoxiang Zi!" The person who had dashed forward and attacked was Xiaoxiang Zi. Can he divide into two? And why was he attacking his own double? They were all puzzled by this.

Once they had settled down, they saw that the person who was tangling with Fan Yiweng was dressed in the clothes of Xiaoxiang Zi; everything was correct from the shoes to the hat. Though his face looked like a zombie, it was not the face of Xiaoxiang Zi. The person who had entered had the face of Xiaoxiang Zi but he was dressed in green. The man in green sent his claw like hands out towards the back of the Xiaoxiang Zi who was holding the scissors and called out, "What kind of hero attacks from an ambush?"

Fan Yiweng was slightly surprised when he saw help had come; this person was dressed in the valley's uniform but he did not know him. He placed his staff to the side and saw the two zombie-like people battle each other.

It was now clear to Yang Guo, the person who was holding the scissors must have stolen his mask as well. He put it on,

changed into Xiaoxiang Zi's clothes and then came here to the hall to stir up trouble. Because Xiaoxiang Zi's face normally was like that of a corpse, no one was able to tell. Though Yang Guo had worn the mask himself, but he did not know what he looked like when wearing the mask. When Cheng Ying had her's on, he didn't dare to look at her too often. He was actually deceived by this person.

He concentrated for a while and recognized the martial arts of the person holding the pair of scissors, he called out, "Zhou Botong, give back my mask and scissors." He then leapt into the middle of the hall and stretched out his hand to snatch the pair of scissors back.

This person was Zhou Botong. He'd had a lapse in concentration and was captured by the fish net of the four disciples of the valley. But Zhou Botong possesses amazing abilities; just a slight lapse in concentration by the four disciples and he immediately broke out of the fish net. Afterwards he hid behind some rocks. He had planned to turn the valley over but then he saw Yang Guo and the other five. In the middle of the night, he ambushed Xiaoxiang Zi; he sealed his pressure points and moved him outside of the house. Then he changed into his clothes. Zhou Botong had great lightness kung fu and he comes and goes without a trace; Xiaoxiang Zi was still asleep when this happened and even Jinlun Fawang didn't notice anything. After he changed clothes, Zhou Botong returned to the stone house and lay down by Yang Guo, and then stole the scissors and mask from his bag. When they woke up the next morning, no one actually noticed anything amiss.

Xiaoxiang Zi tried to unblock his pressure points after they were sealed but Zhou Botong's pressure point sealing skills were powerful; it was six hours before he was able to move his limbs again. At that time, he had only his undergarments on. He was extremely angry and when a valley disciple

passed by, he immediately took his clothes and hurried to the stone building. When he got there, he saw a person dressed in his clothes in a heated battle with Fan Yiweng; his anger was uncontrollable and he threw his palms forward viciously.

Zhou Botong saw Yang Guo coming forward and began to use his skill of left right mutual combat; his left hand came out and in as he fought Yang Guo while his right hand used the scissors and forced Xiaoxiang Zi to stay back. When the scissors opened, the distance between the blades was two feet; if his head were in between the blades when it closed, his head would separate from his neck. Though Xiaoxiang Zi was furious, he did not dare to get close.

When the Valley Master first saw Zhou Botong fight Fan Yiweng, he was already secretly in awe. Now he saw him using two hands to fight two people separately, it was as if he were divided into two. The "Yin Yang Twin Blades" that he practices has some similarities to the technique that Zhou Botong was using; but how could he do two things at the same time like Zhou Botong was doing? He also saw Xiaoxiang Zi's claws were like steel, his stances vicious, and he saw that Yang Guo was graceful and elegant, his form and posture exquisite, he pondered, "There are many able people in this world. The two old men are indeed terrific; though this young man's internal energy is shallow, his form, fists and kicks are filled with elegance." He then said clearly, "Please hold your fists."

Yang Guo and Xiaoxiang Zi leapt back at the same time. Zhou Botong took off his mask and threw the mask along with the scissors towards Yang Guo and then called out, "I've had enough fun, I'm going!" His legs lightly touched the ground and he leapt up onto a beam up in the ceiling.

The valley's disciples gasped when Zhou Botong showed his face. Gongsun Lu'E called out, "Father, it's that old man."

Zhou Botong laughed as he sat on the beam. The beam was thirty feet off the floor; though there were many good fighters in the hall, to follow him and leap up in one go was something that none of them could do.

Fan Yiweng was the Master of the passionless valley's senior disciple and was older than his Master. Apart from his Master, he was the most skilled fighter of the valley; after being ridiculed by Zhou Botong many times, how could he not be angry? He was short and skilled at climbing; his body leapt up and grabbed a pillar, climbing up it like an ape. Zhou Botong loved it when someone tangles with him, he saw him climbing up but couldn't wait for him to reach the beam so he stretched out his hand to receive him.

How would Fan Yiweng know that that it was a kind gesture? When he saw his right hand stretching out towards him, he stretched out his finger and poked the 'Great tomb' pressure point on Zhou Botong's wrist. Zhou Botong felt a slight sensation in his hand and immediately sealed off his pressure point and loosened his muscles. Fan Yiweng felt that his finger was poking something like cotton wool; he quickly pulled his finger back. Zhou Botong's palm turned and struck the back of his arm with a very crisp sound, he called out, "One basket of barley, two baskets of barley, you and me slap the great barley!"

Fan Yiweng was extremely angry, he swung his head and his long beard swept towards Zhou Botong. Zhou Botong heard that urgent gust of wind and propped his left foot against the beam and moved his body, his left hand then held onto the beam and hung his body in the air.

Xiaoxiang Zi knew that Fan Yiweng was not a match for Zhou Botong; even if he went up there to join in as well he would not be able to beat him. He turned around to Nimoxing and Ma Guangzou and said, "Brother Ni and Ma, that old man doesn't give any respect to the six of us; he really has gone too far."

Nimoxing was a rash person and could be offended, Ma Guangzou was slow witted and wasn't clear on what was happening, when they heard him say, 'doesn't give any respect to the six of us', they were angered and both of them shouted. They then leapt towards the beam to grab Zhou Botong's leg. Zhou Botong kicked away their palms with his legs.

Xiaoxiang Zi turned to Yin Kexi and said coldly, "Brother Yin, are you really just going to watch?"

Yin Kexi gave a wry smile and said, "Brother Xiaoxiang, you go first and I'll be right behind you."

Xiaoxiang Zi made a strange whistle, the walls trembled and he suddenly leaped up. His knees were not bent; his whole body and arms were straight as a ruler as he went for Zhou Botong's abdomen.

Zhou Botong saw the incoming attack and pulled in his body and became almost sphere like; his right hand swapped with his left hand in holding the beam. Xiaoxiang Zi clutched thin air and dropped back down. His body was straight as a stick, his feet touched the ground and he jumped up once again. Fan Yiweng was holding onto the pillar and sweeping his beard while Xiaoxiang Zi, Nimoxing and Ma Guangzou kept on going up and down trying to attack him.

Yin Kexi laughed, "This old man's martial arts really are incredible; I'll join in as well." He searched his pockets and

took out a weapon. The hall was lit up with the reflection of pearls and the glimmering of gold; there was a whip in his hand. This whip was made out of gold and silver silk and was embedded with pearls and gems. In the world of Jianghu, one would not be able to find such a precious and lavish weapon as this. There were glimmers of gold and glistening of pearls as the whip was swept towards Zhou Botong's leg.

Yang Guo was amused with what was happening and thought, "These five are showing off their abilities in attacking the Old Urchin; if I don't do something out of the ordinary, I can't claim to be capable." He had an idea; he put on the human skin mask and copied the strange call of Xiaoxiang Zi. He then picked up Fan Yiweng's staff, stood it up against the floor and used the force to throw himself up into midair. The staff was already over ten feet long, so using it as a lever he was able to face Zhou Botong face to face. He called out, "Old Urchin, watch out for the scissors!" The large scissors cut forwards towards his white beard.

Zhou Botong was delighted, he moved his head and called out, "Little brother, your move is pretty amusing."

Yang Guo said, "Old Urchin, I haven't done anything to offend you, why did you make fun of me?"

Zhou Botong, "Things come and go and you haven't suffered one bit; instead you've gained something."

Yang Guo was startled and said, "What came and went?"

Zhou Botong laughed, "Right now I need to be excused, and I can't speak with you." He saw the incoming Golden Dragon whip of Yin Kexi and stretched out his hand to seize it. Yin Kexi's whip twisted and he was about to counterattack his opponent's back when he fell back to the floor.

The Old Urchin said, "Your colorful dead snake is pretty funny." At this moment, Fan Yiweng's beard came sweeping across; his hands were holding onto the pillar and he was relying on his beard to attack his enemy.

Zhou Botong laughed, "So a beard can be used like that?" He copied him and swung his beard towards him, but his beard was a lot shorter than Fan Yiweng's and he had never practiced with it before; the move he made with his beard was useless. A 'shua' sound was heard as he was struck by Fan Yiweng's beard across the cheek leaving a red mark; if he didn't have such profound internal energy, he would have been knocked out. After receiving this attack, Zhou Botong wasn't angry, instead he had great respect towards Fan Yiweng and said, "My beard can't compare to yours, I admit defeat, we don't need to continue."

Fan Yiweng had just had a successful strike and was not going to hold back; his beard came out again. Zhou Botong did not dare to use his beard to meet it again, so his left hand used the techniques of the "Vacant Light Fist", throwing out soft fists. The wind created by the fists forced Fan Yiweng's beard to the right and just at this time, Ma Guangzou had leaped up to make an attack, the beard brushed against his face.

Ma Guangzou's eyes were covered so he grabbed the beard with his two hands. Fan Yiweng's beard had originally been under his control but after being forced away by the wind from Zhou Botong's fists, he lost control of it and it was now in Ma Guangzou's hands. He was startled and did not use force to pull it back. Ma Guangzou was holding it tightly and as he descended, he dragged Fan Yiweng down to the floor.

Ma Guangzou was thick skinned and the fall didn't hurt much. However, Fan Yiweng had fallen on top of him.

Fan Yiweng said angrily, "What are you doing, you still haven't let go?"

Though Ma Guangzou didn't feel much pain from the fall, Fan Yiweng's feet had landed on his stomach and it was quite painful; his anger also erupted and he shouted, "I don't want to let go; what are you going to do about it?" After he said this, he quickly wrapped the beard around his arm.

Fan Yiweng chopped out a right palm and Ma Guangzou moved his head to dodge, however, this was a dummy move and a fist came out from his left hand, landing squarely on Ma Guangzou's nose.

Ma Guangzou called out and returned a punch. When it came to martial arts, Fan Yiweng was much better than Ma Guangzou; but his beard was trapped and he couldn't move his head, so the punch landed on his cheekbone. One tall and one short, the two of them began to fight. Though Fan Yiweng was on top, he could not escape from his opponent.

Jinlun Fawang saw that the hall had fallen into chaos; five people from his side had come out and yet still they were unable to take care of the Old Urchin. This was a bit too shameful. Sounds of 'qiang lang' 'qiang lang' were heard as he took out two wheels, one silver and one bronze. One swept from left to right and the other from right to left forming two arcs of light as they flew towards Zhou Botong. The ringing sounds were urgent and frightening.

Zhou Botong did not know how powerful they were and said, "What are these?" He stretched out his hand to grab them.

Yang Guo called out, "You can't catch them!"

Yang Guo threw the steel staff upwards. A 'dang' sound was heard and the thick, long staff was sent flying towards the corner of the room as sparks flew and dust rose up from the wall. The bronze wheel came back to Fawang and he once again sent it with his left hand. The wheel flew swiftly towards the beam.

After this, Zhou Botong knew that it wasn't good to annoy this monk. He knew that he wouldn't be able to fight off all of them so he flipped downwards and called out, "Excuse me everyone, the Old Urchin has to leave, we'll play again another day." He then ran towards the door. However, four disciples in green had blocked the exit with a large fish net.

Zhou Botong had experienced the fish net before and called out, "Oh no!" He wanted to escape through the window on the eastern side. He saw a green blur and the window was covered by a fish net as well.

Zhou Botong leapt back into the middle of the room and saw that in all four directions there were four disciples in green holding a fish net, blocking his path. Zhou Botong then leapt up onto the beam and used the stance "Surging Sky Palm" to break a large hole in the ceiling. He was about to leap out through the hole when he raised his head and saw that there was also another fish net above. He had nowhere to go and leapt back to the floor. He pointed to the Valley Master and laughed, "Old yellow face, why do you want to keep me here? Do you need a playmate?"

Valley Master Gongsun said dryly, "All you've got to do is return the four things that you took and I'll immediately let you go."

Zhou Botong said surprisingly, "What use have I got with your smelly things? Even if a person could learn martial arts to a state equal to yours, who cares?"

Valley Master Gongsun slowly walked to the middle of the hall. He brushed the dust off his clothes and said, "If today wasn't my wedding day, I would definitely exchange a few stances with you. Just leave the items of the valley here and leave."

Zhou Botong was furious and called out, "So, you say that I've definitely stolen something from you? That's crap, what have you got here in this valley?" He then started to take off his clothes and very soon, he was stark naked. The Valley Master called out to him to stop but was ignored. Zhou Botong then showed his garments inside out, indeed, there was nothing there. The female disciples in the hall were distressed and turned their heads away.

This turn of events was something that the Valley Master had not predicted. The missing objects from the library, pill room, fungi room and sword room were very important and had to be recovered; could it really be that the missing objects were not stolen by the Old Urchin?

Just as he was in deep thought, Zhou Botong clapped his hands and said, "Look at you, you're old but why do you not act your age? You speak without thinking and you act mad and crazy, you do such an embarrassing thing in public, aren't people going to laugh their teeth out?"

These words should have been said to him but he got it in first. The Valley Master didn't know whether to laugh or cry and did not have a reply. He saw that Fan Yiweng was still battling Ma Guangzou so he shouted, "Get up Yiweng, stop tangling with the guest."

Zhou Botong laughed, "Long beard, I like your temper, the two of us can be friends."

In actual fact, Fan Yiweng has been strict and disciplined all his life; he only fought Ma Guangzou because he had no

choice. He wanted to stand up many times but his beard was wrapped around Ma Guangzou's arm and he had no way to escape.

Valley Master Gongsun frowned slightly and pointed to Zhou Botong saying, "I'm afraid that it is you who is embarrassing himself in public and it is you whose actions are laughable."

Zhou Botong said, "I came out of my mother's womb naked and I'm pure and innocent as I stand naked now, what's wrong with that? Look at how old you are yet you still want to marry a beautiful young girl, ha-ha, laughable, laughable!" Those words were like a hammer that smashed into the chest of the Valley Master; his yellow face became red and he couldn't say anything.

Zhou Botong called out, "Oh no, I'm afraid I might catch a cold without wearing any clothes." Suddenly he dashed towards the exit.

As soon as the four disciples in green saw the blur, they immediately moved positions and threw the net over him, trapping him in the net. They felt him struggling fiercely and they tied the corners of the net then carried him over to the Valley Master. The fish net was made out of extremely pliable and soft golden silk; even a precious sword or saber would not find it easy to cut through it. The hand movements of the four disciples were unusual and swift, the net covered heaven and earth as it was brought forward. Even an extremely skilled martial artist would find it difficult to deal with. The only disadvantage was that it required four people to work it; one person alone will not be able to use it. The four of them were extremely proud of themselves after they caught him in one swoop; but when they saw the Valley Master examine the net, he had an expression of displeasure. They quickly looked down; they

were shocked and broke out in a cold sweat. They quickly opened the net up and let two people out; it was Ma Guangzou and Fan Yiweng.

No one could predict that Zhou Botong would suddenly dash out stark naked without his clothes. His hand movements were extraordinarily quick; he had picked up Ma Guangzou and Fan Yiweng and threw them in the net. When the four disciples took in the net, he quickly dashed out. The deception was unnoticeable.

The Valley Master's face was full of humiliation because of what Zhou Botong had done; and even Fawang and the others felt shame in their hearts. They were all thinking, "I class myself as a first rate fighter of Wulin and yet all of us together were unable to capture that mad old man, that is shameful." Only Yang Guo was pleased; he had great respect for Zhou Botong and thought that if he was captured, I would definitely think of a way to rescue him. Since he's managed to escape by himself, then it couldn't be better.

Fawang had originally wanted to learn the background of this Valley Master, but after all this trouble with the Old Urchin, he wasn't in the mood to carry on. He spoke a few words with Xiaoxiang Zi and Yin Kexi then stood up and folded his arms, saying, "Thank you for your hospitality, we ought to stay longer and make acquaintances but we all have other pressing matters to attend to and so we say goodbye."

The Valley Master had originally suspected that Fawang and the others were friends of the Old Urchin, but he had later seen Xiaoxiang Zi fight for his life and Fawang, Yang Guo, Yin Kexi, Ma Guangzou and Nimoxing attacking Zhou Botong. They all had showed signs of helping him so he

folded his hands and said, "I have a request; I wonder will our six guests grant me my wish?"

Fawang said, "If it's in our ability then we'll do our best."

The Valley Master said, "After noon, there will be my wedding procession, I request your presence. This valley is very secluded and remote; there have been very few guests over the last hundreds of years. It is the luck of three generations that today six esteemed guests have arrived."

Ma Guangzou said, "Will there be wine?"

The Valley Master was about to reply when he saw Yang Guo's eyes were fixed on something outside, his face was extremely strange; he seemed to be extremely happy but also appeared to be full of anguish. Everyone was surprised and followed his gaze.

They saw a girl in white passing along a corridor outside. The sunlight shone on her white, cold face and it seemed that the sunlight had turned into moonlight. There was a sparkle under her eyelashes and after she walked a couple of steps, a teardrop rolled down her cheek. Her steps were light; it was as if she was gliding on water as she made her way down the corridor. She did not glance over at the people in the middle of the hall.

It was as if Yang Guo's pressure points had been sealed and he didn't move a muscle. Suddenly he called out, "Gu Gu!"

The girl in white was at the head of the corridor when she heard the call, as soon as she did her body trembled and said faintly, "Guo'er, Guo'er, you're here? Is it you that's calling me?" She turned her head around and appeared as if she was looking for something, but her eyes were uncertain as if she was in a dream.

Yang Guo quickly leapt out of the hall and held her hand, saying, "Gu Gu, you're here, I've searched for you continuously!" He then suddenly called out; there was unbearable pain in the place where his finger had been pricked by the passion flower.

The girl in white called out, her body trembled and she sat down on the floor with her eyes closed, it was as if she had fainted.

Yang Guo called out, "Gu Gu, how are you feeling?"

After a while, the girl slowly opened her eyes and stood up. She said, "Who are you? What did you call me?"

Yang Guo was greatly shocked, he stared at her, if it wasn't Xiao Longnu then who else could it be? He quickly asked, "Gu Gu, It's' Guo'er, how... how come you don't recognize me? Are you hurt? Where are you feeling discomfort?"

The girl looked at him and said coldly, "I do not know you." She then walked into the hall and sat down by Valley Master Gongsun. Yang Guo was flabbergasted; he returned to the hall in a daze and leaned on the back of a chair.

Valley Master Gongsun's face had been unmoved all along but now his face was filled with joy, he raised his hand towards Fawang and the others, saying, "This is my bride; the wedding has been set for today after midday." He then glanced over at Yang Guo wryly, offended by his rudeness just now in recognizing someone wrongly and scaring his new bride.

Yang Guo's shock was indescribable; he said loudly, "Gu Gu, could it be... could it be that you're not Xiao Longnu? Could it be that you're not my Master?"

The girl said, "No! What Xiao Longnu?"

Yang Guo clenched his fists, his mind filled with thoughts, "Is Gu Gu angry with me and doesn't want to recognize me? Is it because we're in danger and she's deliberately pretending? Is she like Godfather and has lost her memories? But Godfather was still able to recognize me. Could it be that there really is someone else in the world that looks exactly like her?" He just said, "Gu Gu, you... you... I'm... I'm Guo'er!"

Valley Master Gongsun frowned slightly as he watched him lose his composure, he quietly said to the girl, "Sister Liu, there are many weird people here today."

The girl ignored him and poured a cup of water. She slowly drank it and glanced over at Jinlun Fawang and the others but she avoided Yang Guo, not looking at him again. Everyone saw her sleeve tremble slightly and water splashed from the cup onto her clothes but she did not notice anything.

Yang Guo's mind was turning upside down and didn't know what to do; he turned around to Jinlun Fawang and asked, "My Master and I have dueled with you before, you remember. Tell me... have I recognized the wrong person?"

When the girl entered the hall, Fawang had recognized her as Xiao Longnu but she completely ignored Yang Guo, he thought that the two must have had a lovers quarrel so he smiled wryly and said, "I don't remember."

He had endured a great defeat by them when Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo used the "Simple Heart of the Jade Maiden" swordplay against him; something which had never happened before. He thought that if the two had quarreled, it really was something that was beneficial to him, why should he help them get back together?

Yang Guo was startled again but immediately understood, in his mind, he was furious, "You really are evil. That day on the mountain top, I helped you to recuperate and now you're doing this to me." He wanted to kill him right there and then.

Jinlun Fawang saw that he had fallen to pieces but his eyes revealed hatred, he pondered, "There's hate towards me in his heart now; if I let him live he will be a problem in the future. Today he's making a spectacle of himself; this really is a good chance to get rid of him." He folded his arms to Valley Master Gongsun and laughed, "Since today is Valley Master's day of celebration, of course we'll attend but it is a bit embarrassing that my friends and I have not brought any gifts."

Valley Master Gongsun was delighted when he heard that they would stay for his wedding, he said to the girl, "These people are great Masters of Wulin; just being able to have one present is a great honour never mind being able to..." He wanted to say six of them but he felt Yang Guo was young. Just now when he fought Zhou Botong, though his form and position were exquisite, his internal energy was ordinary. He felt that his martial arts practice aimed for style over substance and couldn't rank him as one of the 'great Masters of Wulin'. But if he leaves him out and says five, it would be a bit too discourteous, he hesitated a little and said, "...invite these heroes."

Fawang thought to himself, "This Valley Master has a majestic air, and from the formation he set to catch the Old Urchin, his martial arts and intelligence are excellent; but he hasn't got the ability to do great things. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu just said a few words and he's agitated."

Valley Master Gongsun said, "Sister Liu, this is Jinlun Fawang..." He then told her who they were and said Yang

Guo's name last. When the girl heard their names, she just nodded slightly, her face unmoved as if she did not care but to Yang Guo's name, she stared outside and didn't even nod.

Yang Guo's face was red, his mind was turning upside like an ocean storm, whatever Valley Master Gongsun said, he didn't hear. Nimoxing, Yin Kexi and the others did not know his background, they thought that he was embarrassed because he had recognized the wrong person.

Gongsun Lu'E was standing behind her father and heard every single word that Yang Guo had said, she thought to herself, "This morning his finger was pierced by the passion flower, and he immediately suffered pain from yearning for his lover. Right now he's filled with these thoughts, could it be that my new mother is his lover? What are the chances of that? Could it be that these people have come to the valley because of my new mother?" She examined her 'new mother' and saw that her face was expressionless, there was no joy or happiness on her face, neither was there any shyness; she did not look like a new bride at all and her suspicions deepened.

Yang Guo's chest felt as if it wanted to burst, he then thought, "Gu Gu must have a reason for being like this, I better stop running away with these thoughts and find out the truth."

He then stood up and bowed to the Valley Master. He said clearly, "I have a close one, that... that looks extremely like that Miss, I apologize for my mistake just now."

When the Valley Master heard these polite words, his face immediately changed and returned the bow. He then said, "It's not unusual to mistake someone for someone else, who can be blamed? But..." He stopped for a while and laughed,

“To have someone else who looks exactly like her is not only a great coincidence; it is also an extremely odd thing.” He was saying how could there be another equally as beautiful girl under heaven’s skies?

Yang Guo said, “Yes, it is extremely odd. Can I take the liberty to ask this Miss’ surname?”

Valley Master Gongsun had a faint smile and said, “Her surname is Liu. Is your close one also named Liu?”

Yang Guo said, “No.” He pondered, “Why did Gu Gu change her name to Liu?” He then had a thought, “Ah, it’s because I’m named *Yang.” [*Yangliu is the combined name for a willow tree. It symbolically indicates the link between them.] After another thought like this, his finger broke out in unbearable pain again.

Gongsun Lu’E saw his suffering and pitied him, her eyes never left his face.

Valley Master Gongsun examined Yang Guo for a while and then looked at the girl in white, her head was lowered and she didn’t make a single sound. He was becoming suspicious and thought, “Just now when she heard this punk call out, I heard her call out quietly ‘Guo’er, Guo’er, you’re here? Is it you that’s calling me?’ Could it be that she really is that little punk’s Auntie? But why is she not recognizing him?” He wanted to ask her but there were many people present; he thought this matter could be explained later after the wedding, so he took back his words.

Yang Guo said, “This Miss has not lived in this valley for long; I wonder how, did you and her meet?”

In ancient times, ordinarily girls would not meet outsiders easily, and they were even stricter about seeing guests on

their wedding day; but Jinlun Fawang and the others didn't take much notice. Some of them were from the west and the others roamed Jianghu; they weren't restrained by customs and traditions. They just felt that wearing plain white silk on her wedding day was a bit too dull. When they heard Yang Guo inquire about someone else's business when he asked the Valley Master how he met the girl, they felt that he had gone too far.

But Valley Master Gongsun also wanted to know about the background of his bride to be, he thought, "It could be that little punk really knows sister Liu." He said, "Brother Yang is correct. Half a month ago, I was picking herbs by the mountain side when I saw her lying at the foot of the mountain; she had a serious injury and was on the point of death. I examined her and knew that she had suffered a fire deviation while practicing internal energy, so I took her back to the valley and used my family's medicine to help her recover. We met by chance."

Jinlun Fawang interrupted, "This is the so called thousand li fate of marriage led by a string. Miss Liu must have wanted to repay this kindness so she agreed to marry. This really is a match that was made in heaven." His words seemed to be praising Valley Master Gongsun but in reality, he wanted to spite Yang Guo.

When Yang Guo heard this, his face did indeed change dramatically; his body trembled and there was a faint sweet taste at the back of his throat, he threw up a mouthful of blood.

When the girl in white saw this she quivered, "You... you..." She quickly stood up and wanted to stretch out her hand to help him up, but she forced herself to stop. Then she too spat out a mouthful of blood; her white dress was stained by it.

This Miss Liu was a name that Xiao Longnu had made up. That night after hearing the words of Huang Rong, she thought to herself that if she married Yang Guo, she will have caused him to be looked down on by everyone in the world. She felt uneasy about this; but if she were to stay with him in the ancient tomb forever, after a while he would get bored and would not be happy. She thought long and hard, eventually she hardened her heart and quietly left. Her love for Yang Guo was immense; to suddenly leave him like this was extremely difficult. She thought that if she returned to the ancient tomb, he would definitely come back and find her so she wandered alone in a wild, vast valley. One day, she sat down to practice when suddenly her thoughts of love surged forward; it was difficult to control and her inner chi suddenly surged through her veins and meridians and caused her old injury to react again. If Valley Master Gongsun hadn't passed by, she would have died there in the wild mountainside.

Valley Master Gongsun had lost his wife a long time ago; when he saw her, he couldn't imagine that someone could be as beautiful as she; his intent to rescue her had salacious thoughts added onto them.

Xiao Longnu was disheartened; she also thought that if she lived somewhere in seclusion by herself, she would not be able to stop herself and would follow the same disastrous path again. Going out again in search of Yang Guo and cause him grief. She saw the love that Valley Master Gongsun had for her and he asked for her hand. She blocked out her heart and agreed; she thought that after she becomes someone else's wife, she will sever her ties with Yang Guo completely. Along with living in such a secluded place, she assumed that she would never see him again. Who could have thought that Zhou Botong would

suddenly appear to cause trouble in the valley? The results would lead him here.

Xiao Longnu was filled with emotional turmoil at this sudden reunion with Yang Guo. She thought, "I've already agreed to marry someone else; I'll just keep up this act and let him leave in anger and hate me forever. With his talents and appearance, what need is there to worry that he won't be able to find someone else? Though my heart will be in pain for the rest of my life, he will be able to avoid the suffering of the future." Because of this, although she saw Yang Guo suffering, she ignored him; but her heart was mournful and it was becoming more and more difficult to endure. When she saw him throw up blood, she was filled with pity and sorrow; she couldn't help herself and she too threw up a mouthful of blood.

Her face was extremely white, she was staggering and wanted to return inside when Valley Master Gongsun said quickly, "Quickly sit down and don't move, don't disturb your veins and meridians." He turned around and said to Yang Guo, "Just leave; don't ever come back."

Hot tears filled Yang Guo's eyes, he said to Xiao Longnu, "Gu Gu, if I've done something wrong, you can beat me, scold me; even kill me with one thrust of a sword. I'm willing to accept all that. But why are you pretending that you don't know who I am?"

Xiao Longnu lowered her head and didn't reply, just lightly coughing twice.

Valley Master Gongsun was furious with Yang Guo when he angered her into throwing up blood. However, his self-control training was extremely good; he didn't break out in a rage. He lowered his voice and said, "If you don't leave then don't blame me for being merciless."

Yang Guo did not take any notice, his eyes were fixed on Xiao Longnu, he begged, "Gu Gu, I promise you that I will stay in the tomb with you forever; I won't regret it, let's leave together."

Xiao Longnu raised her head and her gaze met his; she saw his face was filled with boundless love along with thousands of pieces of pain and worry. Her heart was moved and thought, "I'll leave with him now!" But she immediately had another thought, "I didn't leave him on a whim. I have thought about all the good and bad points in detail. If I give in, I will bring him trouble in the future." So she turned her head to the side and gave a long sigh before saying, "I don't recognize you, I don't understand what you are saying. Just leave!"

There was no force behind the words but it was filled with love and passion; apart from Ma Guangzou who was a slow person and had no perception, everyone in the hall could tell that she loved Yang Guo and these words were against her heart's feelings.

Valley Master Gongsun was jealous, he thought, "Though you have agreed to marry me, you have never said half a word with such feeling." He looked at Yang Guo and saw a handsome face, his valiant air exuding everywhere; he and Xiao Longnu did indeed make a perfect couple. He pondered, "It looks like these two must be lovers. Because they had an argument, sister Liu agreed to marry me out of anger, she still has feelings for this punk. 'Gu Gu', 'Master', these must be pet names that they use when they are flirting with each other. This punk is older than sister Liu, how can he really call her 'Auntie', 'Master'." As he thought about this, his eyes revealed anger and hatred.

Fan Yiweng was very loyal to his Master. He knew that his Master was lonely and was always thinking of a way that

would be able to solve his Master's loneliness. A few days ago, he saw his Master had rescued a beautiful young girl and the girl had agreed to marry him; he was almost happier than his Master. Now he saw Yang Guo had suddenly come to cause trouble and had made his Master's new wife throw up blood; but his Master was still enduring this. So he came forward and shouted, "The punk named Yang, if you know what's best for you you'll leave! We don't welcome rude guests such as the likes of you."

Yang Guo heard but didn't listen; he said softly to Xiao Longnu, "Gu Gu, have you really forgotten me?"

Fan Yiweng was furious; he stretched out his hand to grab his back, intending to throw him out of the hall.

Yang Guo was concentrating on speaking to Xiao Longnu; he had completely ignored everything that was going on around him. He only noticed something when he felt Fan Yiweng's fingers on his back. He quickly moved out of the way and his opponent clutched thin air, but he heard a 'chi' sound, his opponent had made a hole in the back of his garment.

Yang Guo was becoming more and more anxious after his pleading once again was ignored by Xiao Longnu. If it were in the tomb where there's no one else, he could slowly plead with her; but here in the hall there were many people. Now Fan Yiweng had come out with insults and threats; he felt his whole body was filled with pain and suffering, and he turned all his anger and emotions onto Fan Yiweng. He shouted back, "I'm talking to my Gu Gu, what has it got to do with you Shortie?"

Fan Yiweng shouted loudly, "My Master told you to leave and never come back; if you don't listen then don't blame me for being merciless."

Yang Guo said angrily, "I choose not to leave; if my Gu Gu doesn't leave then I'll stay here for the rest of my life. Even if I die and my bones turn to ash, I'll still follow her." These words were meant for Xiao Longnu.

Valley Master Gongsun looked at Xiao Longnu and saw tears rolling from her eyes and eventually they splashed down on her blood stained dress. He felt sad and worried; he glanced over to Fan Yiweng and made a signal with his hands, telling him to kill Yang Guo and rid the longing that Xiao Longnu had once and for all.

Fan Yiweng was surprised with the signal that his Master had made, he had wanted to send him away from the valley and stop all this trouble and that was it. He didn't think that his Master would actually give him the signal to kill. He said loudly, "Just because it's my Master's day of celebration you think I won't kill you?" He then looked at his Master.

Valley Master Gongsun once again signaled with his hands, telling him to forget about what kind of day it was and just kill him. Fan Yiweng picked up his large staff and slammed it down on the floor, filling the room with vibrations. He shouted, "Little punk, are you really not afraid of losing your life?"

Yang Guo had just thrown up blood and the blood in his chest was rolling about, wanting to be thrown up. The internal energy of the Ancient Tomb sect is all about controlling your emotions, when Xiao Longnu's Master imparted her the formulae, she repeatedly told her to purge her emotions. In the end, Xiao Longnu was not able to control them and as a result, she threw up blood on many occasions.

Yang Guo was taught by Xiao Longnu; his internal energy was of the same nature as hers and now his arms and legs

were as cold as ice. He thought, "I'll throw up blood violently right here and now and die here in front of her; will she still ignore me?" But then he had another thought, "Gu Gu normally loves me very much, there must a reason behind all this; most probably she's being blackmailed by that Valley Master. She has no alternative and that's why she's ignoring me. If I cripple myself, it would be difficult for me to oppose him."

He made up his mind; his heart was stirred and he decided to fight his way out of this problem and rescue Xiao Longnu from this place. He steadied himself and submerged his chi into his dan tian, forcing the blood in his chest to flow back down. He gave a wry laugh and pointed to Fan Yiweng, saying, "This valley feels like it's filled with an air of death. When I want to come, you can't stop me, when I want to leave, don't dream of trying to make me stay."

Everyone saw the emotional state that he was in. He was like a madman but all of a sudden, he had steadied himself; they were all surprised to see this.

When Fan Yiweng saw Yang Guo throwing up blood just now; he felt sorry for him and had no desire to threaten his life. He swept his staff and a fierce gust of wind brushed over Yang Guo's clothes. He shouted, "Are you going to leave?"

Valley Master Gongsun frowned and said, "Yiweng, why are you still going on about leaving?" Fan Yiweng had just received a strict order from his Master; he had no choice but to sweep out his staff towards Yang Guo's shins.

Gongsun Lu'E knew her senior apprentice brother had great martial arts; though he wasn't tall, he possessed great strength and he had learned about seventy to eighty percent of her father's skills. His steel staff had killed

countless wild beasts. She thought that with Yang Guo being of a young age, he would definitely not be able to beat her apprentice brother's eighty one stances of the "Spilling Water Staff". If she waited for them to fight it would be difficult for her to save him. Though she saw her father's face was harsh as frost and filled with anger, she plucked up her courage and stood towards Yang Guo, saying, "Master Yang, staying here will do you no good, why do you want to give your life away for no reason?" Her tone was gentle, filled with compassion.

Fawang and the others looked at her, secretly surprised, thinking, "Yang Guo came to the valley with us; when did he become friends with this girl?"

Yang Guo nodded and laughed, he said, "Thank you for Miss' kindness. Do you want a beard to play with?"

Gongsun Lu'E was startled and asked, "What?"

Yang Guo said, "I'll rid him of his beard and give it to you to mess around with, how about it?"

Gongsun Lu'E lost her color in shock. She thought that he must be bored with his life; actually daring to make a joke like this. The rules of the Passionless Valley were very strict; these few words of advice to Yang Guo would result in a heavy punishment. How could she know that he would reply jokingly? Her face went red; she didn't dare to say anything else and stepped back into the line of disciples.

Fan Yiweng was a short man and was immensely proud of his beard; when he heard these mocking words from Yang Guo, he threw away his staff and rushed forward, shouting, "Little punk, I'll let you experience pain from my beard first." In the middle of his cry, his long beard swept forward.

Yang Guo laughed, "The Old Urchin didn't cut off your beard; let me have a try." He took out his scissors from his bag and cut forward towards the beard. Fan Yiweng's beard was flung forward towards his neck; it had great force behind it. Yang Guo had already moved out of the way; the opened blades of the scissors came forward, a 'ka' sound was heard as they closed.

Fan Yiweng was shocked and he quickly did a somersault to get out of the way; just one slight delay and his beard would have been cut off. This wasn't an ordinary kind of shock. The people who were watching called out quietly.

The reason Yang Guo had asked Blacksmith Feng to make this pair of scissors was so that he could use it against Li Mochou's fly whisk. Li Mochou uses her "Divine Five Poison Palm" and her fly whisk to sweep through Jianghu; her fly whisk techniques were superb. Before Yang Guo could use the scissors to neutralize her fly whisk techniques, he had to first think carefully about how to use it; how he'd need to thrust forward when the fly whisk swayed around; how he'd cut when the fly whisk came forward to attack him. How could he know that before he had the chance to use it against Li Mochou, he would actually come across a person in the Passionless Valley who uses his beard as a weapon? Yang Guo thought, "No matter how good your beard is; it can't be better than Li Mochou's fly whisk." He had no fear and pressed forward with the scissors.

Fan Yiweng had spent over ten years in training his beard technique; because he had his hands for protection, his beard was more lethal than the conventional whip or fly whisk. His head swung around and brought his beard forward; at the same time he threw out two palms towards Yang Guo.

A while go, Zhou Botong had tried to use the scissors to cut off his beard; but instead of cutting it off, the beard wrapped around the scissors, and he could only admit defeat. Everyone had seen the martial arts of Zhou Botong; everyone knew that Yang Guo could not compare to him. Who knew that in the hands of Yang Guo, the scissors swept, cut and threatened; going to and fro like it was in a dance? It was actually better than the way Zhou Botong had handled the scissors and everyone marveled. In the proficiency of martial arts and internal energy level, of course Yang Guo was miles behind Zhou Botong; but he had carefully studied the stances of Li Mochou's fly whisk and had devised scissors stances to counter them. Because the way the beard was used was similar to that of the fly whisk, the scissors were indeed effective against the beard and Yang Guo got the upper hand. Of course this was different to the unplanned and unstructured scissor techniques of Zhou Botong. But Fawang and the others did not know the reason behind it; they saw with their own eyes Zhou Botong thrusting the scissors towards him. In accordance with his character, this would be something that he would devise to cause trouble. Yang Guo was most proficient with a sword and Fawang knew this.

On many occasions, Fan Yiweng was almost injured by the scissors and as a result, he stopped looking down on Yang Guo. He changed his stance and swung his beard wildly around, striking out in all directions, attacking forward and sweeping across. This actually formed another set of stances. Yang Guo cut downwards many times but each time he caught thin air, he also felt the wind from his opponent's palms was fierce. Sometimes the beard was a decoy while the palm was real, at other times the palms lured the opponent and the beard attacked; this was a set of ingenious martial arts that the world of Wulin had never seen before.

In a short while, tens of moves were exchanged. Yang Guo thought, "The Valley Master is vicious and cruel; his martial arts would definitely be much better than this shortie; if I can't beat the disciple, how can I beat the Master?" He became slightly impatient. But Fan Yiweng's beard was thicker and longer than Li Mochou's fly whisk; as the beard spread out, there really were no weaknesses.

After a few more stances, Yang Guo concentrated on his opponent. He saw his opponent's head swinging around; he had a ludicrous appearance and his beard was getting faster and faster. His head was swinging around especially fast and suddenly he had a thought; he had found a way to break this martial art of his. Yang Guo leapt back five feet and called out, "Hold off!"

Fan Yiweng stopped his attack and said, "Since you've admitted defeat little brother, just leave!"

Yang Guo shook his head as he laughed and said, "After your beard's been cut, how long will it take to grow back?"

Fan Yiweng said, "What's it got to do with you? I've never cut my beard before."

Yang Guo shook his head and said, "Pity, pity!"

Fan Yiweng said, "Pity what?"

Yang Guo said, "In three stances I'm going to cut off your beard."

Fan Yiweng thought, "You and I have already fought for tens of stances and we're at a draw; you must be dreaming if you think you can win in just three more stances." Fan Yiweng shouted, "Watch this stance!" His right palm came chopping out.

Yang Guo slanted his left palm and smashed down with the scissors in his right hand, attacking the opponent's forehead on the left side. He was tall, when the scissors attacked his opponent's head it cut downwards. Fan Yiweng slanted his head to avoid the attack but then, Yang Guo's left palm came downwards across his forehead on the right side. There was a vicious force behind the chop; Fan Yiweng quickly moved his head to the left. The opponent's attack was fast, his reaction was also very swift and his beard followed him and swung upwards. Yang Guo's scissors had been opened and was guarding the right; a 'ka' sound was heard as the scissors cut down. He cut off over two feet of the beard.

Everyone called out and all felt shocked; they saw that he did indeed succeed in cutting off Fan Yiweng's beard in three stances.

After fighting for a long time, Yang Guo eventually found out that when Fan Yiweng's beard was flung to the left, his head would first move right; when the beard was swung upwards, his head would first hang down; he cursed himself for being so stupid, "His beard is on his head, if the beard moves, he will of course first move his head. I didn't attack the source and tangled with his beard, what an idiot." He planned his three attacks and then told him that he would cut off Fan Yiweng's beard in three stances.

Fan Yiweng was stunned as he watched the beard that he has grown for half his life floating to the floor; he felt anger and sorrow at the same time. He went up and down as he picked up his staff and then shouted angrily, "If you don't kill me, then don't dream of leaving the valley."

Yang Guo laughed, "I wasn't planning on leaving in the first place!"

Fan Yiweng swept his staff towards his waist.

Ma Guangzou had fought with Fen Yiweng previously and had been on the receiving end; right now he was feeling rather pleased and said loudly, "Old Shortie, you face wasn't the best sight in the first place; but after losing your beard, you look even weirder."

When Fan Yiweng heard this, he clenched his teeth and fought even harder.

Yang Guo only knew what his soft beard techniques were like and didn't know how strong he was; he saw the incoming staff and stuck out his scissors; a 'dang' sound was heard and his arms felt numb, the scissors had been bent out of shape.

Just one stance and the scissors were out of commission. The onlookers had seen Yang Guo gain victory but they didn't predict that the weapons would change and the battle would continue. The difference between the two could be clearly seen, one was holding an extremely long and heavy weapon while the other was holding a piece of scrap metal.

Gongsun Lu'E could not hold back anymore and called out, "Master Yang, you're not as strong as my senior apprentice brother; why continue?"

Valley Master Gongsun was beginning to get angry when he saw his daughter protecting an outsider; he glanced at her and saw her face was filled with concern. He then looked at Xiao Longnu and saw that her expression was calm, appearing like she had no concern for Yang Guo's safety whatsoever; his anger immediately turned to joy. He thought, "So she has no feelings for that punk; otherwise, how could she have no concern for him now that he's facing danger?"

He didn't know that Xiao Longnu knew that Yang Guo was ingenious and his martial arts were above those of Fan Yiweng; when the two fight, victory is certain so there was no need for her to worry.

Yang Guo threw the bent scissors on the floor and said, "Old Fan, you're not a match for me, just throw away your staff and surrender."

Fan Yiweng said angrily, "If you can beat my staff then I'll knock myself dead."

Yang Guo said, "What a pity, what a pity!"

Fan Yiweng called out, "Watch this stance!" A stance of "Pushing Down the Peak of Mount Tai" was sent out towards his head. Yang Guo dodged to the side and his left foot was placed on the head of the staff. Fan Yiweng shook his hands, flinging the staff. Yang Guo followed the staff and was forced into midair, but his left foot was still standing steadily on the staff head. Fan Yiweng shook the staff a few times but couldn't shake Yang Guo off. He was about to turn the staff when Yang Guo's right foot advanced and he was actually running towards him on the staff.

In the eyes of Fan Yiweng and the onlookers, these two stances were inconceivably strange; but in reality, it was a technique of the Ancient Tomb sect that utilizes great lightness kung fu to defeat a long and large weapon.

Years ago when Li Mochou fought Wu Santong in Jiaying, she stood on the chestnut tree that Wu Santong had used as a weapon and she couldn't be shaken off by him. Li Mochou had used this type of martial art.

Fan Yiweng was stunned and in this time, Yang Guo's left foot had advanced a step and he kicked out with his right towards his nose. Fan Yiweng was in an extremely

distressing situation; the enemy was attached to his weapon. If he leapt backwards he would bring the enemy with him and would not be able to avoid that kick. His hands were holding onto the staff so he couldn't use his hands to block; his beard had been cut off and couldn't be used as defensive weapon. It was an urgent situation and he had no choice but to throw away the steel staff and leap back to avoid the kick.

A 'dang' sound was heard as one end landed on the floor. Before the other end landed as well, Yang Guo had picked it up in his hands.

Ma Guangzou, Nimoxing, Xiaoxiang Zi and the others cheered.

Yang Guo placed the staff on the floor and laughed, "What about it?"

Fan Yiweng's face went red and said, "I was careless and fell for your trick, I'm not accepting it."

Yang Guo said, "We'll go again." He threw the staff towards Fan Yiweng who stretched out his hand to catch it. However, when the staff was two feet in front of him, it suddenly swept up. Fan Yiweng clutched thin air while Yang Guo flew over and stretched out his arm, taking the staff once again. Ma Guangzou's and the others' cheers were becoming louder. Fan Yiweng's face was now purple.

Fawang and Yin Kexi looked at each other and both secretly laughed, praising Yang Guo's cleverness. Yesterday, Zhou Botong had shot out broken spearheads towards them with the force immediately taken back as soon as it shot out; after the spearheads flew out, they suddenly changed direction in midair; now Yang Guo was copying him. But there were four spearheads while there was only one staff; the staff was also heavy and to change the force was not

hard; what Yang Guo had done was much easier than what Zhou Botong had done.

But Valley Master Gongsun and his disciples did not know what it was about and all were shocked.

Yang Guo laughed, "What? Do you want to go again?"

His beard had been cut and weapon taken but it was all due to cleverness; how could he admit defeat without any protest? He said loudly, "If you use real martial arts to beat me then I'll admit defeat."

Yang Guo chuckled, "In martial arts, ingenuity comes first. Your Master's mind is unclear; of course the disciples he teaches will be lacking a bit. I'll give you some advice; it's better if you go and find another Master." These words were an insult directed at Valley Master Gongsun.

Fan Yiweng thought, "My study of martial arts is lacking and I've disgraced my Master; if I really can't win then I'll commit suicide to apologize to Master." He clenched his teeth and stood up straight.

Yang Guo swept the steel staff towards him and placed it in his hands, he said, "Be careful this time; if you lose your staff again, you won't be able to blame anyone else."

Fan Yiweng did not reply. He held the end of the staff tightly with his right and thought, "You'll only be able to take away this staff if you cut off my right arm."

Yang Guo called out, "Careful!" He flung himself forward until his left hand rested on the end of the staff; the index and middle finger of his right hand went towards his opponent's eyes; at the same time, his left foot had flipped upwards and was holding down the staff's body. This was a

stance from the “Dog Beating Stick Technique”, “Stealing the Staff from the Mouth of the Tiger”.

On the previous two times that Yang Guo took the staff, though everyone thought his movements were special, they all saw what happened clearly. But this time even Fan Yiweng didn’t know what was going on; he just blinked and the staff was in the hands of the opponent again. Only Jinlun Fawang with his profound martial arts knowledge and his experience of the “Dog Beating Stick Technique” knew that Yang Guo had used one of the skills of this stick technique.

Ma Guangzou called out, “The ‘No Beard Long Beard’. Are you in awe now?”

Fan Yiweng called out, “He used witchcraft, and it isn’t real martial arts, why should I admit defeat?”

Yang Guo laughed, “How will you admit defeat?”

Fan Yiweng said, “Only if you use real martial arts to beat me, then I’ll admit defeat.”

Yang Guo returned the staff to him and said, “Fine, we’ll go another couple of stances.”

Fan Yiweng was extremely worried about his clever empty-handed staff snatching techniques; he thought, “No matter how much advantage I get, when he’s at a point where he can hold me off no longer he’ll suddenly use his witchcraft. It would be difficult for me to win.” So he said, “I use such a large and long weapon yet you are empty handed, even if I win you won’t take it.”

Yang Guo laughed, “You’re afraid of my “Empty Hands Entering A Hundred Blades” kung fu; fine, I’ll use a weapon.” He scoured the room and all he saw were bare walls, there wasn’t one single weapon that he could use.

However, in the courtyard there were two large willow trees; it had many branches and had emerald green leaves hanging down from it. He looked at Xiao Longnu and said, "Since you want to have Liu as a surname, I'll use a willow branch as a weapon!" He leapt into the courtyard and broke off an inch thick branch; it was about four feet long. The length and thickness was similar to the Beggar Clan's Dog Beating Stick. The branch still had its leaves which gave the weapon elegance.

Xiao Longnu's mind was fluttering all over the place; she had no plans for the future, the longer that Yang Guo was in her sight, the harder it was for her to leave him. She pondered to herself, "Though separating from Yang Guo was heartbreaking, she had a thought about this a hundred times and was able to tolerate it." Right now, he was here in person in front of her very eyes; every word of his, every action, every smile and even his anger, all of them moved and stirred her heart. She wanted to go inside and stop seeing and hearing him but how could she? She lowered her head and didn't say anything; but she was feeling as if a thousand steel knives were cutting right into her heart.

End of Chapter 17.

Chapter 18 - Valley Master Gongsun

Translated by Noodles



Gongsun Zhi was using his greatest skill "Yin Yang Wild Blades". The black sword was originally soft and yin but right now it was hacking and

chopping solidly, changing into the yang and hard nature of saber play. Meanwhile, the heavy and clumsy jagged saber was now piercing and cutting, going down the road of lightness and swiftiness. The saber had become a sword, the sword had become a saber, and it really was extraordinary.

Fan Yiweng was furious when he saw Yang Guo pick a willow branch as a weapon, treating this as if it was a game and showing no respect towards him at all. He didn't know that within the softness of the willow branch there was also toughness and that he was going to use the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" with it. Though it couldn't compare with the bamboo treasure of the Beggar Clan, it was a lethal weapon that matched any precious sword or saber.

Ma Guangzuo said, "Brother Yang, just use my saber!" He took the saber out of the sheath and the blade glimmered; it really was a sharp blade.

Yang Guo saluted with his arms and laughed, "Thank you! This brother isn't a bad person; it's just a pity that he follows the wrong Master. His martial arts are poor and just a willow branch will be enough to beat him." The willow branch moved forward and attached itself to the steel staff.

Once again, Fan Yiweng heard him insult his Master; he was thinking that this time it will be a life and death battle; he was not going to hold anything back. He waved the staff around which generated noises within the air and started to use his eighty-one stances of the "Spilling Water Staff". The reason behind the name 'Spilling Water' is that no splash or spill of water can advance; the staff stances were extremely tight and unyielding.

At first, the staff was swift and powerful, but after a few stances, he felt that the staff was gradually moving towards one side. The head of the staff felt skewed and the wind generated by the staff was becoming weaker.

Yang Guo was using the “Dog Beating Stick Technique’s” ‘coil’ theory; the branch was attached to the staff head and when the staff moved to the east, the branch moved to the east; when the staff was flipped upwards, the branch followed; but at the final stage, his internal energy forced the staff to pull or push a little more in another direction and staff head moved out of the control of Fan Yiweng. This particular ‘coil’ formulae of the “Dog Beating Stick Technique” is derived from the advanced martial art theory of ‘four liang moving a thousand jin’, subtle and ingenious, this theory far exceeded the methods of ‘using force against force’ or ‘using the current to move the boat.’

The onlookers were becoming more and more surprised; they could not believe that the very young Yang Guo would possess such ingenious martial arts. They saw that Fan Yiweng’s staff was gradually becoming weaker while Yang Guo’s willow branch was becoming stronger.

Thirty stances later, Fan Yiweng’s staff was completely under the control of the willow branch; the more strength Fan Yiweng used, the more uncontrollable the staff became. In the end, he felt as if he had entered an extremely strong cyclone, making him dizzy and dazed, completely losing his bearings.

Valley Master Gongsun’s hand came down on the stone table, and called out, “Yiweng, stand down!”

The noise created was thunderous, even Yang Guo’s heart skipped a beat; he thought to himself, “I can’t let him slip away.” He then shook his arm and changed to the ‘turn’

formulae; his body froze and his wrist kept on drawing circles, turning Fan Yiweng around like a spinning top. The faster that Yang Guo turned his hands, the faster Fan Yiweng spun; the staff in his hand acted like the handle of a spinning top. Yang Guo said, "If you can stop your feet and don't fall, then you're a man. But if your master can't teach, then the disciples he teaches will trip up in battle." The willow branch lifted upwards and he leapt backwards over ten feet.

Fan Yiweng's body and mind were not under his control at this moment in time; he was stumbling, and after a few more turns, he would fall to the floor.

Valley Master Gongsun suddenly leapt up and palmed the head of the staff in midair and lightly came back down. That move he did appeared to be ordinary and light but there was a great force behind it; he had slammed the staff two feet into the floor and stopped it spinning. Fan Yiweng grabbed the staff tightly and didn't drop, but his body was stumbling and swaying as if he was drunk, his bearings lost for the time being.

Xiaoxiang Zi, Yin Kexi and the others looked at Yang Guo, and then looked at Valley Master Gongsun; they now knew that these two people were definitely not easy people to deal with. They planned to watch this great battle from the side without interfering. Ma Guangzuo was the only one who had intended to help Yang Guo; he called out, "Brother Yang, great kung fu! Shortie has lost!"

Fan Yiweng breathed in deeply and steadied himself; he turned around and suddenly knelt down before his Master. He then kowtowed four times and without saying a word, suddenly ran towards a stone pillar.

Everyone was shocked; no one had predicted that his character was so fiery that after suffering a defeat he would kill himself.

Valley Master Gongsun called out, "Oh no!" He leapt up from his table and stretched out his hand to grab his back; but they were too far apart and Fan Yiweng was very quick, the Valley Master could only grab thin air.

Fan Yiweng used all his strength in his effort to run into the pillar but suddenly he felt his forehead going into something soft. He raised his head and saw Yang Guo with his two palms out standing in front of the pillar.

He said, "Brother Weng, what is the most painful thing in the world?"

When Yang Guo saw Fan Yiweng kneeling down to his Master, he knew that he was up to something so he prepared himself. He was close to Fan Yiweng and managed to get ahead of him, keeping him from the pillar with his palms.

Fan Yiweng was stunned, he asked, "What is it?"

Yang Guo said mournfully, "I don't know myself. But the pain in my heart is ten times greater than yours yet I haven't killed myself; why are you doing this?"

Fan Yiweng said, "You've won; what pain have you got in your heart?"

Yang Guo shook his head and said, "What's so important about winning and losing in battle? I don't know how many times I've been beaten in my life. When you tried to kill yourself, your Master worried about you. If I tried to kill myself, my Master would think nothing of it; that is a deeply hurtful thing."

Fan Yiweng still did not understand. Valley Master Gongsun called out sternly, "Yiweng, if you have any more stupid thoughts then you'll be disobeying the orders of your Master. Stand to the side and watch me take care of this scum."

Fan Yiweng did not dare to disobey his Master and retreated. He stared at Yang Guo; he himself did not know what he felt towards him...anger, loathing, or respect?

When Xiao Longnu heard Yang Guo say 'If I tried to kill myself, my Master would think nothing of it'; her eyes turned red and more tears fell from them. She thought, "If you died, do you think I'd still be able to live?"

Valley Master Gongsun had kept his eye on her all along and now he suddenly saw her tears once again; he was jealous and angry. He clapped his hands three times and called out, "Catch that little rat." He looked upon himself highly, thinking that it was beneath him to fight Yang Guo. The two groups of disciples from the side responded. They stood in all directions and suddenly called out; each group of four held a fish net and they surrounded Yang Guo.

Yang Guo and Fawang arrived here with the others with Fawang being the head of the group; now that it had come to this, he should come out and make a stand on this issue; but all he did was chuckle and watched from the side.

The Valley Master did not know what Fawang was thinking and assumed that he was laughing at him for not being able to handle Yang Guo, he thought, "I'm going to show what the Passionless Valley is made out of." He again clapped three times.

The sixteen disciples crossed and changed positions, decreasing the size of the encirclement a few steps. The

four nets kept on changing positions, from horizontal to vertical, from straight to bend.

Yang Guo had seen the disciples in green twice use this fish net formation to catch Zhou Botong; its variations were indeed profound and it was extremely hard to defend against. This formation and Quanzhen's "Big Dipper Formation" each had its own strong points. He thought, "The Old Urchin with his martial arts was captured by this net formation; how am I going to cope? If he just wanted to escape and he threw Ma Guangzuo and Fan Yiweng into the nets and took the opportunity to slip away, it would not suit his purpose. My intent is to stay here."

Each net was over ten feet wide and the handlers were hidden behind it; if he wanted to defeat this formation he would first have to attack the green disciples who were holding the nets. But as soon as he got too close, he would be captured by the nets. He had no way of making his move. The sixteen were pressing closer and closer. Yang Guo didn't know what to do and could only use the Ancient Tomb's lightness kung fu to dart and fly around in the hall; floating here and dashing there making it hard for the opponents to predict the direction he was heading.

He moved around in all directions but the sixteen disciples did not follow him; they just shank the encirclement step by step. Yang Guo dashed around as he searched for a way to defeat this formation. He saw that although the nets were turning around extremely swiftly, the places where they overlapped each other remained covered and didn't show a gap at all. He thought, "There's nothing I can do apart from using projectiles to hurt the handlers." He swiveled around once and there were a handful of Jade Bee needles in his hand, he waved out his left hand and shot out seven or eight Jade Bee needles at the four disciples north of him. He saw that the four of them were about to get hit when he

suddenly heard light 'ding ding ding ding' sounds; the Jade Bee needles were sucked in by the net. The fish net was actually embellished with small magnets; with such a large net, no matter how powerful the enemy's projectile, it would still be blocked by the net. The Jade Bee needle was seventy percent gold, thirty percent steel; because of this thirty percent, the Jade Bee needles were attracted by the net's magnets.

Yang Guo thought that this strike would succeed; how would he know that this net actually had so many clever uses? He quickly looked at the Valley Master and knew that it would be of no use to fire out any more projectiles. His right hand went into his pockets and put the needles away. He was just about to think of another way to break the formation when the net from the east side came closer. The leader of the four handlers whistled, a gold light flashed across his eyes as the net came over his right shoulder. Yang Guo darted back and was about to escape to the north west when the nets from the north and west side pressed forwards.

Yang Guo cursed, "It's over...it's over! I wonder what torture I'll endure after falling into the hands of this Valley Master." Suddenly he heard one of the handlers of the southern net call out, "Oh no!" Yang Guo turned his head and saw that Gongsun Lu'E had fallen onto the floor; one of the corners of the net was hanging down loosely.

This was the only route out of the formation; Yang Guo didn't give it another thought and darted out of the encirclement. He saw Gongsun Lu'E had fallen onto the floor calling out in pain but she was signaling with her eyes to leave the valley at once.

Yang Guo thought to himself, "I'm really touched by her kindness. But if I leave the valley, Gu Gu would definitely be

forced into marrying that old Valley Master. I don't care if I get captured and suffer the pain of a thousand knives, I'll never leave." He stood in the corner of the room and looked at Xiao Longnu thinking, "I've just experienced great danger yet you still have no reaction?" He saw that Xiao Longnu was still hanging her head and keeping quiet.

The Valley Master clapped his hands twice and the nets suddenly dispersed. He turned to Gongsun Lu'E and said coldly, "What's wrong with you?"

Gongsun Lu'E said, "My leg suddenly had in a painful cramp."

Valley Master Gongsun suspected that his daughter had fallen in love with Yang Guo and as a result gave him an escape route at such a critical moment. But because there were outsiders here it wasn't appropriate for him to break out in a rage, he laughed coldly and said, "Fine, stand down. Shi Si'er will take her position."

Gongsun Lu'E lowered her head and stood down. A youngster in green responded and stepped forward. This person was only fourteen or fifteen years of age and had their hair tied in two plaits.

Gongsun Lu'E glanced at Yang Guo with grieving in her eyes. Yang Guo felt apologetic and said to himself, "I'm afraid that I won't be able to repay her kindness and compassion in this life."

Valley Master Gongsun clapped his hands four times and suddenly the sixteen disciples retreated. Yang Guo was shocked, thinking, "Could it be that you admit defeat?" Just as he was wondering about this, he turned his head and saw Gongsun Lu'E had a fearful expression on her face; she kept on signaling to him with her eyes to leave the valley. From her appearance, it appeared that he was going to

face something extremely dangerous. Yang Guo smiled; instead of running away, he pulled a chair over and sat down. There was a light ringing noise in the inner halls and the sixteen disciples came out again, their hands still holding fish nets.

Everyone's expression changed as soon as they saw the nets; the fish nets had been changed and now it were full of hooks and blades that glimmered. They were extremely sharp; whoever gets caught in the net would be pierced all over and would have no hope of surviving.

Ma Guangzuo called out, "Hey, Valley Master, do you want to lose face? How can you use such an evil thing to treat your guests?"

Valley Master Gongsun pointed to Yang Guo and said, "I don't want to hurt you. I've warned you many times to leave the valley but you chose to stay here and stir up trouble. This is your final warning, leave quickly."

Even someone with Ma Guangzuo's courage shivered at the sight of the nets; when he heard the hooks and knives colliding with each other, he was even more afraid. He stood up and pulled Yang Guo's hand, "Brother Yang, it would be better for us to leave than face this evil thing; why do you insist on quarrelling with him?"

Yang Guo looked at Xiao Longnu waiting to see her response.

As soon as Xiao Longnu saw the Valley Master summon out blade and hook laced nets, she had prepared for death. As soon as Yang Guo gets caught in the nets she would throw herself on them. They would die together in each others arms. When she thought about this, she felt peace in her heart, thinking that all the world's pain and suffering will be

gone in a flash. Her lips couldn't stop themselves from showing a smile.

How would Yang Guo know what she was feeling at this time? He thought about how he was about to face a great danger yet she could still smile; his heart was in pain, even more deeply than before. In the midst of these feelings of hurt, sorrow, indignation, and approaching danger, he suddenly had an idea and didn't continue on with these thoughts. He went over to Xiao Longnu and bowed lightly. He said, "Gu Gu, Guo'er is in danger today; I would like to borrow your silk belt and silk gloves."

Xiao Longnu was only thinking about the joy of dying with him and nothing else; when she heard these words she immediately took out a pair of silk gloves and a silk belt to give to him.

Yang Guo received them slowly and stared at her, he said, "You're acknowledging who I am now?"

Xiao Longnu was filled with love and smiled, "My heart acknowledged you long ago!"

Yang Guo's spirits were greatly lifted and he quivered, "You've decided to leave with me and not marry that Valley Master?"

Xiao Longnu smiled and nodded, "I've decided to go with you, and of course I won't marry anyone else. Guo'er; naturally that makes me your wife'."

When she said 'go with you', she was talking about dieing with Yang Guo. Yang Guo didn't understand so of course the others would not either; but her words of 'naturally that makes me your wife' couldn't be clearer. Valley Master Gongsun's face went white and he hurried the disciples in

green to make their move. The sixteen disciples set the nets in motion and moved around.

After hearing these words of Xiao Longnu's, Yang Guo felt as if he was bought back to life from death; his courage and valor soared; even if he were facing greater dangers he wouldn't care. He put on the impregnable silk gloves and held the silk belt in his right hand. The silk belt was sent out with its ringing noises like a white snake.

At the end of the silk belt was a gold bell, the belt extended and retracted once, the bell had struck the 'Concealed Valley' pressure point of one of the disciples in the southern position and on its way back it struck the 'Crooked Pond' pressure point of one of the disciples in the eastern position. The 'Concealed Valley' pressure point is found on the knee, the person could not stay upright and knelt on the floor; the 'Crooked Pond' pressure point is found on the elbow area, as soon it was struck, the person's arm became numb and limp, the fish net slipped out of their hands.

After those two pre-emptive attacks, the fish net formation immediately broke up. The four disciples in the west were shocked and when they attacked they were slightly slow; Yang Guo's gold bell turned towards them and after another two strikes, another two disciples had their pressure points struck. But at this time, the net from the north was thrown over his head. The knives and hooks were half a foot away from his head; he couldn't use the silk belt to deal with them.

Yang Guo's left hand turned upwards and grabbed the fish net; he used its force and flung it away. Although he grabbed hooks and daggers, his hands were covered by the silk gloves and were completely protected. The net was now heading back towards the four disciples in green.

When these disciples practiced this net formation, the only thing they were afraid of was the enemy slipping through the net; they concentrated on keeping it tight and unyielding. The thought of the net returning over them had never entered their minds. They watched as the glittering knives and hooks came towards their heads; they knew exactly how powerful the net was and called out in alarm as they let go and leapt away. The youngster who replaced Gongsun Lu'E was weaker than the rest; a dagger eventually pierced his thigh, blood poured and he fell down, crying out in pain on the floor.

Yang Guo laughed, "Little brother, don't be scared, I'm not going to hurt you." His left hand flipped the net away and his right moved the silk belt. Sounds of 'qiang lang lang' and 'ding ling ling' were heard as the hooks and daggers collided with each other with the golden bell ringing. The sounds were extremely crisp. After this, none of the disciples dared to come forward and stood far away by the wall. But because they hadn't received the order to back down by their master, they didn't dare admit defeat and run away. Though they didn't admit defeat, they had already lost.

Ma Guangzuo clapped and cheered for a while but because he was the only one, he felt a bit lonely and glanced over to Fawang saying, "Hey monk, aren't brother Yang Guo's martial arts great? Why aren't you cheering?"

Fawang laughed and said, "His skills are great, extremely good but there's no need to call out like that."

Ma Guangzuo asked, "Why?"

Fawang saw that the Valley Master was frowning and was now making his way towards the centre of the hall slowly. Fawang concentrated on him and ignored Ma Guangzuo.

When Valley Master Gongsun heard Xiao Longnu say, 'naturally that makes me your wife', he knew that his sweet dream of the past two weeks had come to an end; though he was disappointed and angry, he thought, "Even if I can't have your heart I'm going to have you. I'll kill that bastard in one palm and I don't care what your feelings towards me will be, after a time, your heart will eventually return to me."

Yang Guo saw that his eyebrows were rising higher and higher to a point where his brows and eyes looked like they were standing straight up; he didn't know what school of martial arts this was from and became slightly afraid. His right hand lifted the silk belt and his left clutched the net, he was completely prepared. He knew that this battle would decide the life and death of he and Xiao Longnu; he didn't dare to allow one strand of carelessness in his actions.

Valley Master Gongsun circled around Yang Guo slowly. Yang Guo too turned around slowly on the floor; he didn't dare to gaze away from him. He saw that he was still delaying making his move and knew that when he attacked, it will be extremely swift and vicious. All he saw was him raising his hands, leveling them three times in front of him and then his hands came together. The sound generated was as if gold and iron had collided. Yang Guo's heart skipped a beat and he moved back a step. Valley Master Gongsun suddenly stretched out his right arm and grabbed the fish net, pulling it away to one side. Yang Guo felt that his pull had great force behind it; his fingers ached and he could only let go. Valley Master Gongsun threw the net to the four disciples and shouted, "Stand down!"

After having the net snatched away, Yang Guo didn't allow him to make the first move again. The silk belt shot out and the gold bell shook, attacking the opponent's 'Large Bone'

and 'Celestial Tripod' pressure points on the shoulder and neck.

Valley Master Gongsun's chest was open with his arms stretched out to the side but Yang Guo didn't dare to attack the major pressure points on his chest rashly. He first attacked the smaller pressure points on his body to test him out.

Valley Master Gongsun's martial arts were actually from a different school of martial arts; he ignored the pressure point attacks of the bell and stretched out his right arm to grab Yang Guo's arm. A 'ding ding' sound was heard as the 'Large Bone' and 'Celestial Tripod' pressure points were struck but he didn't feel it. A 'hu' sound was heard as the grab turned into a palm, striking towards Yang Guo's chest on the left side.

Yang Guo was alarmed and quickly leaned his body to the side. Luckily for him, his lightness kung fu was excellent and he avoided this sudden palm from his opponent.

Yang Guo had once heard the great fighters of Wulin, Ouyang Feng, Hong Qigong and Huang Yaoshi talk about martial arts, and knew that when someone has reached advanced levels of internal energy that, at the time the opponent strikes their pressure points, they were able to seal off themselves and negate the attack. But they will still show some effects of their pressure points being attacked. Ouyang Feng's martial arts could lead to reversal of the veins and the major pressure points over one's body to change position. When someone sees his legs above his head, they would be able to tell immediately.

But the enemy he is facing now actually made no response to his pressure points being struck; it was as if he didn't have any pressure points on his body. This type of martial

arts is rarely seen or heard of; he couldn't stop some fear from creeping into his heart. He saw his palms had turned over and there seemed to be black air within the palms. While it was coming towards him the wind was forceful and pressing, he didn't dare to receive it head on. He used the silk belt to tangle with him while his left hand protected the vital areas of his body.

Soon, they had exchanged over ten stances. Yang Guo had put all his concentration into fighting him. Suddenly he saw the left palm of his opponent coming lightly towards his chest; it appeared to be a soft palm but it was the opposite; it was actually a palm from the same set of palm skills as Wanyan Ping's "Iron Palm". He quickly leaped away a couple of feet.

When the Valley Master's palm met thin air, he didn't take it back and the palm kept on going forward another two feet; he moved quickly and the palm was now in front of Yang Guo. Normally, when a person fires out a punch or sends out a palm, the strength originates from the arm. They would pull back their arm and send out the attack; but the attack Valley Master had just used now originated from his body. His hand and palm didn't move; he was actually using the force from his body to attack the opponent. Although the force from the body is greater than that from the arm, using it to send out a palm or punch will result in slower attacks; but Valley Master Gongsun's palm was both fierce and swift.

Yang Guo wanted to lean his body to the side to avoid the palm but there was no time, he could only send out his left palm and meet it head on. A 'pai' sound was generated as the palms collided; Yang Guo was jolted back three steps while the Valley Master stood his ground with his body swaying a little.

Standing there without moving, the Valley Master appeared to have the upper hand; but in actual fact the power from Yang Guo's palm had caused a throbbing pain in the side of his body; he was extremely shocked. "I'd used all my power behind that "Iron Palm", but that punk was still actually able to receive it. If we carry on like this I may not be able to kill him. If we fight to a draw, I won't be able to say anything." He clapped his hands twice; the sounds were ear piercingly loud. He said, "The one named Yang, I have been merciful in that palm, do you know that?"

If this were a normal martial arts duel, and if Yang Guo continued fighting, he would definitely lose. When the Valley Master said these words he should have admitted that his martial arts were weaker; but today he knew that the opponent would never allow him and Xiao Longnu to leave in peace. He had no other option but to engage in a fight to the death. Yang Guo still had his ridiculing and derisory nature towards his opponents and Xiao Longnu had returned to him now; his heart was overflowing with joy. He laughed and said, "If you kill me, how can my Gu Gu marry you? If you don't kill me, my Gu Gu still would not marry you. What mercy is there? It's just that you couldn't do anything to me!"

Yang Guo was too kind in his surmising of his opponent's thoughts. The Valley Master would love nothing more than to kill him in one stroke to avoid him causing any problems in the future. Even if it caused Xiao Longnu to hate and loathe him, he couldn't have cared less; he couldn't do anything to Yang Guo because his palms couldn't do anything to him. He turned towards his daughter and said, "Take out my weapons."

Gongsun Lu'E delayed and didn't reply.

Valley Master Gongsun shouted, "Didn't you hear?"

Gongsun Lu'E went pale and could only reply, "Yes!" She then left for the inner halls.

Yang Guo looked at the expression of the two and thought, "I couldn't cope when he was empty handed; now that he's going to use some weird weapon, what chance have I got? If we don't leave now, when should we leave?" He went over to Xiao Longnu and stretched out his hand, softly saying, "Gu Gu, let's leave!"

Valley Master Gongsun gathered energy in his hands; as soon as Xiao Longnu stands and takes Yang Guo's hand, he'll immediately throw himself forward and attack Yang Guo's spine viciously with the "Iron Palm". He made his decision and thought, "I don't care if sister Liu hates me; I'm going to kill that punk. If sister Liu leaves with him, what joy will I have left for the next half of my life?"

But Xiao Longnu did not stand up, just saying calmly, "Of course I'll go with you. But the Valley Master did save my life; we need to explain everything to him and ask for his forgiveness."

Yang Guo was flustered and thought, "Gu Gu doesn't know anything. Do you think he's going to forgive us just like that because you've explained everything to him?"

Then he heard Xiao Longnu ask him, "Guo'er, have you been well over the last couple of days?" She said these words with great compassion and love.

When Yang Guo heard these gentle, loving words and saw her affectionate expression, he felt that if even the sky was falling down on him he wouldn't care. How could he still be thinking about trying to escape? He said, "Gu Gu, you're not angry with me?"

Xiao Longnu smiled and said, "Why should I be angry with you? I've never been angry with you. Turn around." Yang Guo listened to her and turned around but didn't know what she wanted to do.

Xiao Longnu took out a little bag with string and needles in them. She threaded the needle and measured the hole that Fan Yiweng had torn on the back of his garment. She sighed and said, "Over these past few days I've wanted to make a new gown for you; but when I thought about how I'll never see you again, I thought 'what's the point?' I could never have dreamed that you would find your way here." The pain and grief in her words turned to joy and delight as she said this. She picked up a pair of small scissors and cut a piece of fabric from the corner of her gown. She slowly helped him repair his garment.

When the two lived in the tomb, whenever Yang Guo's clothes were torn or ripped, Xiao Longnu would call him over and help him repair them just like this. Over the years, this happened countless times. The two of them did not care about life and death anymore; though they were under the stares of many people in the hall, the two of them acted as if no one was there and did as they used to when they lived with each other in the ancient tomb.

Yang Guo was filled with boundless joy and hot tears rolled down from his eyes, he choked, "Gu Gu, just now I made you throw up blood, I... it was my fault."

Xiao Longnu smiled, "It's not your fault. You know I had this kind of illness long ago. I haven't seen you for a few days and your martial arts have advanced so much. You threw up blood as well just now, are you alright?"

Yang Guo laughed, "It's nothing. I've got more than enough blood to spare."

Xiao Longnu smiled, "You love to talk nonsense."

Though the words of the two were ordinary and plain, everyone could hear the love that the two had for each other and that the two had an extremely deep relationship.

Fawang and the others looked at each other. Valley Master Gongsun was shocked and jealous; he stood there stunned not knowing what to do.

Yang Guo said, "I've met some interesting people over the last few days. Gu Gu, guess where I got my pair of large scissors from?"

Xiao Longnu said, "I was wondering about that; it's like you knew that there was a long bearded old man here long ago, so you prepared a large pair of scissors to cut off his beard. You really are naughty; he's taken years to grow that beard and you cut it off just like that, isn't it a pity?" She gave a laugh as her bright eyes sparkled; her appearance was enchanting.

Valley Master could not endure this any longer; he stretched out his hand towards Yang Guo's chest and shouted, "Bastard, you're too disrespectful."

Yang Guo didn't block it and said, "There's no need to rush, I'll continue the fight once Gu Gu finishes repairing my garment."

Valley Master Gongsun's fingers were just a few inches away from his chest; he had the status of being a Master and even though he was furious, it would be inappropriate for him to attack him like this. Suddenly he heard Gongsun Lu'E call out from behind, "Father, the weapons are here." He didn't turn around as he moved backwards a few feet and took the weapons.

His left hand held a thick and wide jagged saber; the blade glittered with gold light and it appeared to be produced from gold; his right hand was holding a fine and long black sword and it shook a little in his hands displaying the softness of the blade. The edges of the blade emitted a blue light and it was extremely sharp. The two weapons were the opposite of each other; one was heavy and hard, the other light and soft.

Yang Guo just took one look at the strange weapons before continuing “Gu Gu, a few days ago I met a woman; she told me who my father’s murderer was.”

Xiao Longnu’s heart trembled and asked, “Who is it?”

Yang Guo bit down on his teeth and said with hatred, “You could never have guessed who they were, and all along I’ve been thinking that they’ve been treating me extremely well.”

Xiao Longnu said, “They? They’ve been treating you extremely well?”

Yang Guo said, “Yes, They are...” A clear buzzing sound that resonated without stop was heard; it was Valley Master Gongsun’s black sword colliding with his golden saber. His wrist turned and three consecutive swings that sliced through the air were unleashed; one aimed towards Yang Guo’s head, one aimed at the left side of Yang Guo’s neck and other at the right side of Yang Guo’s neck. They all passed within half an inch of his flesh. The Valley Master was looking after his status; since the enemy did not make a move to block these attacks he couldn’t land them; but the accuracy of these attacks was unnerving.

Xiao Longnu said, “I’ve finished!” She patted him on the back.

Yang Guo turned around and smiled. He then made his way towards the centre of the hall with the silk belt.

Valley Master Gongsun's "Yin Yang Twin Blades", "Fish Net Formation" and "Closure of Pressure Points" were all passed down from his ancestors. But because they have lived in the valley in seclusion for all these years and haven't made any contact with outsiders for hundreds of years, these three extraordinary martial arts were unknown to the outside world. Another reason for its seclusion was that there were great weaknesses within all three sets of these martial arts. If a skilled martial artist discovers the weakness, the user would not be able to avoid death. His ancestors had passed down a strict rule; members of the valley were forbidden to go out and get involved in Jianghu affairs for this reason. Over twenty years ago, Valley Master Gongsun also learned martial arts of the Iron Palm School. Although the person who taught him wasn't some extraordinary martial artist, their knowledge was vast. Their thoughts were careful and attentive; this person helped him cover up numerous holes in his family's martial arts. In particular, a lot of changes were made to the stances of the "Yin Yang Twin Blades". This person said to him, "This set of saber and sword technique is now greatly improved; even if you're opponent is extremely clever, they will not be able to see through the trappings of this technique within fifty stances. But once your saber and sword is unleashed, how can your opponent withstand fifty stances of it?"

When he saw Yang Guo motioning the silk belt to battle him, he called out, "Watch out for the sword!" The black sword quivered and it pierced towards Yang Guo's chest; but the sword did not go straight towards his chest; instead it circled around in front of him. Yang Guo did not know

where the sword was aiming and in shock, he leapt backwards.

Valley Master Gongsun's attacks were extremely fast; when Yang Guo leapt back, the circles of the sword were thrust towards him. The circles were becoming bigger and bigger; at first it only circled around the chest area, but afterwards it covered the lower abdomen, and after a few more stances the encirclement gradually reached his neck. All the vital points between the neck and the lower abdomen of Yang Guo were covered by the sword tip. Fawang, Yin Kexi, Xiaoxiang Zi and the others has never seen such a swordplay where circling of the sword is used to press the opponent; they were shocked.

As soon as Valley Master Gongsun unleashed a stance, Yang Guo would immediately dart away; he drew ten circles with his sword and each time, Yang Guo backed away and had no way to attack. Yang Guo saw that the enemy's swords stances were becoming swifter and more intense while the jagged saber in his left hand had still to be unleashed; when he actually uses it he would probably have no chance at all. There wasn't time for any more thoughts and he leapt to the left while motioning the silk belt; a ringing 'ding ling ling' and the gold bell went flying towards the opponent's left eye. Valley Master Gongsun slanted his head to dodge the attack and stopped his attack. Yang Guo was delighted, he quickly motioned the silk belt and wrapped it around his right leg; he was about to pull backwards when Valley Master Gongsun's sword drew downwards and slashed the belt in two; the black sword was actually an extremely sharp weapon.

Everyone gave an 'ah' sound just in time to hear the gust of a fierce wind; Valley Master Gongsun had chopped down with his jagged saber towards Yang Guo. Yang Guo rolled on the floor. A 'dang' sound was heard which echoed

throughout the room; Yang Guo had actually picked up Fan Yiweng's steel staff to block the attack and the saber collided with it; both of their arms trembled and were slightly numb. Valley Master Gongsun was shocked, "This punk really is good; he is actually able to receive ten of my stances." The saber chopped across and the sword pierced diagonally. A saber should take ferociousness and hardness as its aim, a sword swiftness and lightness; the two weapons were complete opposites. To use both a saber and sword at the same time is impossible; but Valley Master Gongsun's attacks were becoming more and more pressing and the sword and saber techniques were both clearly distinguished. There was softness and hardness, yin and yang; this really was a rarely seen great skill of the Wulin world.

Yang Guo gave out a call and waved the steel staff; he used the "Dog Beating Stick Technique's" 'seal' formula, guarding his body tightly. Valley Master Gongsun wasn't actually able to attack him with his twin blades as he did this. But the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" has subtlety and variation as its main aim; a light and fine bamboo stick can be used as pleased, but the heavy and long staff in his hand cannot. After a few more stances, he felt that variation of the stances gradually became ineffective.

Valley Master Gongsun suddenly found a weakness; the gold saber lifted up and the black sword drew down; a 'ka' sound was heard as the black sword cut the steel staff in half.

Yang Guo called out, "What luck! Just when I was thinking that this staff is too heavy!" A great increase in the effectiveness of the stances could be seen when Yang Guo continued using this slashed half staff.

Valley Master Gongsun gave a 'huh' grunt and said, "We'll see whether it's lucky or not." The saber in his left hand chopped forward.

The saber slashed down towards Yang Guo's head. This stance was rather slow and sluggish, all Yang Guo had to do was to slant his body to the side a little and he would be able to avoid it easily; however, the circles from the black sword were covering all his paths leaving him with no way to escape. Yang Guo could only raise his broken staff and use a stance of "Lifting the Sky with One Hand" to meet this stance head on. A loud 'dang' sound was heard as the two weapons collided; sparks flew everywhere as Yang Guo felt his arms go numb. Valley Master Gongsun continued the attack; he used the same stance as before. Yang Guo was knowledgeable in martial arts and he was extremely quick witted in battle yet he wasn't actually able to neutralize such a clumsy stance; there was no other choice for him but to meet this stance in the same way again. Yang Guo's arms ached even more after this second collision; he knew that if this continued, the tendons in his arm would suffer great damage. Before he finished his thoughts, the Valley Master had sent down a third chop. After a few more chops, the saber had hacked a groove on the staff and the joints in Yang Guo's right hand started to bleed.

Valley Master Gongsun saw that even in the face of danger Yang Guo still carried his smile; the saber in his left hand chopped down and he thrust the black sword suddenly towards his lower abdomen. Yang Guo had been forced back into the corner of the hall; when he saw the sword tip coming he stretched out his hand to block it. When the sword arrived at his palm, the blade bent in an arc and flicked away. Xiao Longnu's silk gloves were very tough, even though the black sword was extremely sharp, it still couldn't harm him.

Yang Guo knew that with the gloves he would not have to fear the black sword; he turned his palm around and suddenly stretched out his hand to grab the sword, wanting to do the same thing as Xiao Longnu did when she snapped Hao Datong's sword. But he didn't know that Valley Master Gongsun would flick his wrist lightly and curve his sword around his hand, piercing him in the forearm; blood flowed out of the wound.

Yang Guo was shocked and quickly leapt back. Valley Master Gongsun did not continue the attack and instead chuckled a few times before slowly advancing again. If Valley Master Gongsun had either the jagged saber or black sword only, Yang Guo would definitely have a way to defend against him; but as the soft and hard blades were used simultaneously against him, he was forced on the back foot, struggling against the attacks.

Fawang, Yin Kexi, Xiaoxiang Zi and Nimoxing were all thinking, "The Valley Master's 'Yin Yang Twin Blades' is extremely swift, powerful and vicious; but at the same time, that kid is pretty clever, thinking of so many ways to avoid all these vicious stances."

Valley Master Gongsun chopped with his saber and thrust with his sword; Yang Guo was struck in the shoulder and blood trickled over his gown. Valley Master Gongsun said in a deep voice, "Are you in awe of me yet?"

Yang Guo smiled and said, "You came into battle with me having a huge advantage, and here you opening your mouth asking whether I'm in awe of you or not. Ha-ha, Valley Master Gongsun, how come you don't save face?"

The Valley Master took in his sword and saber and then asked, "Please tell me what advantage I have?"

Yang Guo said, "You're using customized weapons; one is a strange saber the other is an extraordinary sword; even if I searched all over the world I'm afraid that I wouldn't be able to find such weapons, isn't that true?"

The Valley Master replied, "So what? Your gloves and silk belt aren't ordinary either."

Yang Guo threw the broken staff onto the floor and laughed, "This belongs to your bearded disciple." He took off the gloves and picked up the two pieces of silk belt. Yang Guo threw them over to Xiao Longnu and said, "These belong to my Gu Gu." He cleaned off the dust on his body not taking any notice of the bleeding wounds that he had; he laughed, "I came to your valley empty handed; what ill intent did I have? If you want to kill me then kill; why must you talk so much?"

Valley Master Gongsun saw that he had a leisurely air about him; his face and eyes were elegant and handsome and even with all those wounds on him, he talked and laughed at ease as if nothing had happened. He couldn't help but feel inferior to him and thought, "I cannot compare with this person; if I let him live, sister Liu's heart will remain his." So he said, "Fine!" He thrust the sword forwards towards his chest.

Yang Guo had already decided, "Since I can't beat him then I'll let him kill me." When he saw the sword coming towards him, he ignored it and instead looked over at Xiao Longnu, thinking, "I will die happy with Gu Gu in my eyes." He saw Xiao Longnu's face carrying a sweet smile and getting closer step by step; their eyes were locked on each other, both of them ignoring the black sword of Valley Master Gongsun.

Valley Master Gongsun had not met Yang Guo before, what feud has he got with him? The only reason he's trying to kill him is because of Xiao Longnu, so when he sent out this sword, he couldn't help but glance over at Xiao Longnu. When he saw her, his heart immediately filled with jealousy; he saw her staring at Yang Guo lovingly, and when he looked over at Yang Guo, he was doing the exact same thing toward her. The black sword had reached Yang Guo and all that was needed was a bit of force from his arms and it would pierce into Yang Guo's chest; but there was no fear or concern on Xiao Longnu's face. Yang Guo also made no attempt to block this attack; the two of them stared madly at each other, their thoughts were one, they had long forgotten about life and death.

Valley Master Gongsun broke out in a great rage, thinking to himself, "If I kill him now, sister Liu will immediately kill herself because of her love for him. I need to think of a way to force her to marry me; once I've bedded her there'll be plenty of time to kill that punk." He called out, "Sister Liu, do you want me to kill him or spare him?"

When Xiao Longnu was staring at Yang Guo, she had not thought about Valley Master Gongsun; only after hearing this sudden call did she wake up and said alarmed, "Move the sword away; why are you pointing your sword at his chest?"

Valley Master Gongsun chuckled, "It's not difficult to stop the sword. If you want him to live, just tell him to leave the valley immediately and let us get married."

Before Yang Guo came, she had decided to never see him again; she didn't care if she would live the rest of her life in grief and pain. All she hoped for was that he would be safe and happy; but now that they've reunited, how could she still agree to marry the Valley Master? For the past few

days, she knew that she couldn't carry out the decision that she had made and would rather die than marry someone else; so she turned her head to the Valley Master and said, "Mr. Gongsun, thank you for saving my life. But I cannot marry you."

The Valley Master knew the reasons but still asked, "Why?"

Xiao Longnu stood with Yang Guo and held his arm, smiling; "I have decided to marry him and spend the rest of my life with him, could you not tell?"

The Valley Master shook his head a few times and then said, "If you hadn't promised me that day, why would I do this and try to force you? You promised with your own lips that it was what you wanted."

Xiao Longnu said, "That is correct, but I cannot give him up. We need to go now, please forgive us." She pulled Yang Guo's hand and headed for the door.

Valley Master Gongsun quickly moved to block the exit and hissed, "The only way you'll leave the valley is over my dead body."

Xiao Longnu said, "I'm indebted to you for saving my life; how can I try to harm you? Anyway, your martial arts are too strong for me." As she talked, she tore off a piece of fabric from her gown and helped Yang Guo tie up his wounds.

Jinlun Fawang suddenly said loudly, "Valley Master Gongsun, you better let them leave."

The Valley Master gave a 'huh' grunt, his face was serious and he didn't reply.

Fawang continued, "If those two joined up with their swords, how would your gold saber and black sword be able

to handle them? Just do them a favour and let them go.”

He'd suffered the greatest humiliation in his life after losing to Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu's "Pure Heart of Jade Maiden Sword"; ever since then, he'd been thinking of a way to defeat this swordplay but was unable to. Now he had seen how powerful the yin yang blades of the Valley Master were; it wasn't below the martial arts of his golden wheel. So he came out with these words to anger him, hoping to make the three go into battle. Firstly, he could get a chance to take a look at Yang Guo's and Xiao Longnu's swordplay again and look for its weakness so he can avenge this defeat. Secondly, he hoped that the three would destroy each other.

In actual fact, if Fawang hadn't come out with these words to anger the Valley Master, he would never agree to let Xiao Longnu leave the valley with Yang Guo. He stared angrily at Fawang and thought, "You dare to say such words in front of my face? I haven't got time for you now, but I'll remember this for the future." He turned his head towards Xiao Longnu and clenched his teeth as he thought, "Your heart doesn't belong to me but your body will. You won't agree to marry me when you're alive, then I'm still going to marry you even when you're dead." At first he had planned to use Yang Guo's life to force Xiao Longnu to submit to him; but when he saw that the two weren't afraid of death, he thought that even if they die together, he wouldn't let them out of the valley. His eyebrows rose again and an air of death gradually showed up on his face.

He suddenly heard Ma Guangzuo call out, "Hey, old man Gongsun, she said that she doesn't want to marry you; why are you still blocking her way? Don't you want to save face?"

Xiaoxiang Zi said eerily, "Don't talk rubbish brother Ma. Valley Master Gongsun has already set up a feast today and has invited us to join in the celebrations."

Ma Guangzuo said loudly, "All he's got is water and vegetables; what's so great about that? If I were that girl I would never marry him. With her beauty, she can be the empress. Why should she stay with this cruel and evil old man for the rest of her life, eating nothing but green vegetables and tofu? Even if one didn't get annoyed to death, they'd be bored to death."

Xiao Longnu turned her head and said gently, "Master Ma, Mr. Gongsun saved my life and I'm indebted to him, I... I... I'll always be grateful for his kindness."

Ma Guangzuo called out, "Fine, old man Gongsun, if you want to show that you're a kind and benevolent person then why don't you let the two of them marry and consummate the marriage today. If you saved a girl because you wanted to bed her, then doesn't that put you in the same class as those raping lowlife bandits?" He was a straightforward man and says what comes into his mind; his words were all hard on the ears but they were hard to refute.

Valley Master Gongsun's intent to kill was stirred; he decided that he'll take care of all the outsiders in one go. He didn't make a move and said dryly, "My Passionless Valley may not be some extraordinary place; but if everyone here comes and goes as they please, then the one named Gongsun may appear to be a bit too humble in the eyes of others. Miss Liu..."

Xiao Longnu showed a smile and said, "I lied to you when I said my surname is Liu; my surname is Long. I named myself Liu because he's named Yang."

Valley Master Gongsun felt even more jealous; he could only pretend that he didn't hear those words and said, "Miss Liu, this..."

Before he finished Ma Guangzuo interrupted, "This girl is named Long, why are you calling her Miss Liu?"

Xiao Longnu said, "Mr. Gongsun is used to calling me that; the blame is on me for lying to him in the first place, he can call me whatever he likes."

Valley Master Gongsun ignored these words and continued, "Miss Liu, all the one named Yang has to do is beat my "Yin Yang Twin Blades" and I'll allow him to leave the valley safely. Our personal affairs will be severed of their own accord; it'll have nothing to do with other people." After all this, he still wanted to rely on his martial arts to force Xiao Longnu to stay.

Xiao Longnu sighed and said, "Mr. Gongsun, I did not want to fight you, but he can't beat you on his own, I must help him."

Valley Master Gongsun's eyebrows became a straight line; he said, "Aren't you afraid of what happened before; you throwing up blood? It'll happen again."

Xiao Longnu felt great remorse towards Valley Master Gongsun and said, "We haven't any weapons; if we fight you empty handed, then we'll definitely lose. You're a great and generous man; just let us go."

Jinlun Fawang interrupted, "Valley Master Gongsun, you've got everything here in this valley, don't tell me you haven't even got two swords? But I'd better warn you first; once those two join up together, your life will be endangered."

Valley Master Gongsun pointed to the western path and said, "The third room over there is the sword room; just pick whatever weapon you want. But I'm afraid even these guests may not have the kind of weapons that I've hidden away." He then laughed coldly.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu looked at each other and both thought, "I will die willingly if we're able to spend time alone with each other away from other people before then." They held each other's hand and headed west, leaving through the side door. They passed two rooms and arrived at the third.

Xiao Longnu's eyes never left Yang Guo's face; when she saw the doors were closed she didn't give it any thought and pushed it open; she was just about to step into the room when Yang Guo suddenly thought of something and urgently pulled her back, he said, "Careful."

Xiao Longnu said, "Of what?"

Yang Guo's kept his left foot outside the room and placed his right foot into the room, quickly touching the floor before taking it back outside. Nothing happened.

Xiao Longnu said, "You're afraid that the Valley Master would leave a trap for us? He's a very kind person; he would never do such a thing..." As soon as she finished saying this, a sudden 'chi chi' sound was heard; there was a flash of light in front of them as eight sharp swords shot out all around the door frame, crossing over horizontally and vertically. If someone had stepped into the room at that time, even if your martial arts were supremely high, getting your body pierced several times over by the swords would be difficult to avoid.

Xiao Longnu let out a deep breath and said, "Guo'er, this Valley Master is so evil; I've really judged him wrongly. We

don't need to fight him; let's just leave."

Suddenly someone said from behind, "Our master invites you inside to pick a sword."

The two turned around and saw eight disciples with a fish net blocking their way. The Valley Master was wary of the two escaping together so he sent these disciples to cut off their escape routes. Xiao Longnu's silk belt had been cut in half by the black sword; she was now unable to use it to strike their pressure points from faraway as Yang Guo did before.

Xiao Longnu said to Yang Guo, "What other traps has this room got?"

Yang Guo held her hands and said, "Gu Gu, we're reunited now, what other worries have you got? Even if we get pierced by ten thousand swords it wouldn't matter; we'll see each other again in death." Xiao Longnu's heart too was overflowing with love. The two entered the sword room together.

The wall, tables, shelves and cupboards were all lined up with sharp weapons of various shapes; there were antique swords, some that had seven foot long blades and others that were quite short. There were iron and steel ones; a few had an overpowering glow. The two's eyes were blinded for a second.

Xiao Longnu stared at Yang Guo for a while and then suddenly threw herself into his arms. Yang Guo held her tightly and kissed her on the lips. Both Xiao Longnu's heart and soul were completely enchanted by that kiss. She stretched out her arms to embrace him around his neck.

Suddenly the door opened and a disciple in green entered who said sternly, "Our master ordered that as soon as

you've picked your weapon, immediately leave, you cannot waste time."

Yang Guo's face went red and he removed her arms. But Xiao Longnu thought that there was nothing wrong with hugging and kissing her loved one. However, there was someone disturbing them which made it difficult for her to feel comfortable; so she gave a sigh and said softly, "Guo'er, once we've beaten that Valley Master, kiss me like that again."

Yang Guo smiled and nodded; he stretched out his left arm and put it around her waist and said, "There isn't enough time in this life for our kisses. Just pick a weapon."

Xiao Longnu said, "It appears that these weapons are indeed all special, there isn't one poor weapon. We haven't got nearly as many in our ancient tomb." She glanced over the weapons on the wall, wanting to pick out a pair of swords that were the same in all ways and most effective for her and Yang Guo to use against Valley Master Gongsun. But after searching for a while, she saw that all the swords were different. She was searching for a weapon and asking a question at the same time. "When we were about to enter the room, you knew that there would be booby traps, how did you know?"

Yang Guo said, "I guessed from the eyes and expression of the Valley Master. He wanted to marry you but when he heard that you were going to help me fight him, he immediately thought about killing you. I didn't believe for a second that someone with his character would allow us to pick out weapons out of the kindness of his heart."

Xiao Longnu gave another sigh and said, "Will we be able to beat him with our "Pure Heart of Jade Maiden Sword"?"

Yang Guo said, "Though his martial arts are strong, he's not better than Jinlun Fawang. The two of us were able to beat Jinlun Fawang; I assume that we'll be able to beat him."

Xiao Longnu said, "Yes. The reason why Fawang kept on trying to force him to fight us is because he wanted to see us in danger."

Yang Guo smiled, "People can have evil thoughts; now, you've learned a bit about this." He then said immediately, "I'm just worried about your health, you've just thrown up blood."

Xiao Longnu's dimples from her smile were like a flower, she said, "You know that whenever I'm angry or upset I throw up blood. Now that I'm extremely happy, this little internal injury isn't anything to me. You threw up blood too, is it serious?"

Yang Guo said, "I'm fine as long as I can see you."

Xiao Longnu said tenderly, "That's how I feel too." She paused and then continued, "You've made much progress in your martial arts recently; and we were able to beat Fawang back then."

When Yang Guo heard these words, he too felt great confidence about this battle. He held her hand and said, "I want you to promise me something, will you?"

Xiao Longnu said tenderly, "Why is there a need to ask me? I haven't been your Master since long ago; I'm your wife. I'll listen to whatever you say."

Yang Guo said, "That's... that's great, I... didn't know."

Xiao Longnu said, "How can I still be your master after what happened that night on Mount Zhongnan, when you

and I were that intimate. Though you didn't want to marry me, in my heart I was already your wife."

Yang Guo did not know exactly what happened that night. Maybe the reason for suddenly bringing this up again is because she's emotional, he thought, "My father Ouyang Feng was teaching me martial arts that day; he sealed your pressure point, but I wasn't intimate with you." But when he heard the tenderness and love in her words, he was completely enchanted and couldn't say anything.

Xiao Longnu rested against his chest and asked, "What do you want me to promise you?"

Yang Guo stroked her hair and said, "Once we beat that Valley Master we'll immediately go back to the tomb; no matter what happens you cannot leave my side."

Xiao Longnu lifted her head and looked into his eyes, she said, "Do think that I have thoughts of leaving you? Do you think that the pain and suffering I'll experience if I part from you won't be as great as yours? Of course I'll promise you; I'll never leave you even if the sky falls down."

Yang Guo was delighted; he was about to say something when the disciple in green who was watching them said loudly, "Have you picked your weapons?"

Xiao Longnu smiled and said, "Let's just get it over with." She turned her head to look for a pair of swords when the western wall caught her eye. She was startled; the wall had signs of being set alight and the chairs and tables near it were also burned.

Yang Guo laughed, "The Old Urchin had broken into here previously and set this place alight; that's his handiwork." He then saw two sheaths behind a painting in the corner. He thought, "Those two swords were hidden originally by

that painting; it's only because of the Old Urchin's fire burning that painting that enables me to see them now. Those two swords must be extremely precious to have been hidden away like that." He went over to the wall and took the swords down; he gave one to Xiao Longnu and unsheathed the sword that was in his hand.

Xiao Longnu unsheathed her sword too. Both of them felt a chill as soon as the blades were drawn out; they saw that his sword was black and didn't have any shine to it, like a piece of black wood. Her sword was the exact same as Yang Guo's. When the two swords lined up, the room was filled with a cold air. The swords had no sharp points; the tips of the swords were round and blunt and they looked like a thin wooden whip. Yang Guo turned the sword over and saw the word 'Gentleman' carved on it; he looked over at Xiao Longnu's sword and saw the word 'Lady'. Originally Yang Guo did not like the form of this sword, but he loved the matching names; he looked at Xiao Longnu to see what she thought.

Xiao Longnu said happily, "This sword has no sharp points; this is just right for dueling with the Valley Master. He saved my life before; I don't want to hurt him."

Yang Guo laughed, "The names of the swords are 'Gentleman' and 'Lady'. I'm not worthy of the name. If 'Gentleman' was changed to 'Vagrant', it'd be much better for me to use." He then tested out the sword with two thrusts into the air and felt that the weight was perfect and the sword extremely agile; he said, "Fine, we'll use these two swords."

Xiao Longnu returned her sword into its sheath and was about to leave the room when she saw some extremely beautiful flowers in a vase on the table; but it wasn't arranged properly so she decided to fix it up.

Yang Guo called out, "No, you can't touch them." But it was too late; Xiao Longnu's finger had been pierced by the thorns of the flowers. She turned her head back startled, asking, "Why?"

Yang Guo said, "Those are Passion Flowers; you've been living here in the valley for a few days now, don't you recognize them?"

Xiao Longnu sucked her finger and shook her head. She said, "I don't recognize them. Passion Flower; what kind of flower is it?" Yang Guo was about to explain but the crowd of disciples kept on hurrying them so they left the room and returned to the hall. Valley Master Gongsun had been waiting impatiently, he stared angrily at his disciples, blaming them for being useless and allowing the two of them to waste time. All of the disciples were terrified and changed color.

Valley Master Gongsun waited for the two to come near before saying, "Miss Liu, you've picked your weapon?"

Xiao Longnu took out the 'Lady' sword and nodded her head, saying, "We'll use this pair of blunt swords to fight you; we don't dare to fight a life and death duel with the Valley Master, but just until a clear victor can be seen, how about that?"

The Valley Master's heart trembled and said sternly, "Who told you to pick those swords?" His gaze swept across to Gongsun Lu'E and then back to Xiao Longnu.

Xiao Longnu felt slightly surprised and said, "No one told us to pick them. If we can't use them, we'll go and change them."

The Valley Master stared angrily at Yang Guo and said, "If I let you change your weapons, how long will it take, half a

day? There's no need to change, just start."

Xiao Longnu said, "Valley Master Gongsun; let's make things clear before we start. If we fight one on one, neither of us are a match for you. We've got an advantage fighting you two against one. We don't really want to fight you and we're not competing with you. All you've got to do is allow us to leave and we'll admit defeat and thank you."

The Valley Master chuckled and said, "If you beat my "Yin Yang Twin Blades" then I'll let you treat me anyway you want; if I win you have to marry me."

Xiao Longnu gave an unperturbed smile and said, "If we lose, we'll just die here in this valley."

Valley Master Gongsun did not say anything more; the golden saber in his left hand waved out towards Yang Guo.

Yang Guo raised his sword and used a stance of "The White Crane's Bright Wing"; a stance of Quanzhen swordplay.

Valley Master Gongsun thought, "Though this stance is tight and careful, it's just ordinary and steady." His right sword headed towards Yang Guo's shoulder, actually winding past Xiao Longnu, both the sword and saber were aiming for Yang Guo. Yang Guo concentrated on his opponent and guarded his body tightly as he received three stances.

Xiao Longnu waited for the Valley Master to unleash his three stances before she raised her sword. The Valley Master did not use his sword or saber to block her sword stances; only in urgent situations did he use the black sword to repel her attacks. He showed signs of allowance in his stances.

After watching seven or eight stances, Jinlun Fawang gave a wry laugh and said, "Valley Master Gongsun, giving them

such allowances will lead to suffering for you.”

The Valley Master replied, “Big monk, if you don’t think much of me then why don’t you wait for a little while and duel with me later. I don’t need you to waste your breath in trying to give me advice.” He hurried his sword and saber and the wind sounds from the weapons became increasing louder.

After a few more exchanges, Yang Guo used a stance of “Sweeping Across the Northern Desert” from the Quanzhen swordplay while Xiao Longnu used the “The Coloured Pen Painting an Eyebrow” stance from the “Jade Maiden Swordplay” Both of these stances were horizontal strokes, Yang Guo’s sword just swept across a few inches from the left to right while Xiao Longnu flicked her sword subtly twice. The two stances became the stance “Dressing Under the Mirror” from the “Pure Heart of Jade Maiden Sword”. Valley Master Gongsun was shocked, he raised his black sword to block Yang Guo’s sword and swept his saber across to guard his face. Xiao Longnu’s sword drew across above his eyes, the sword and saber clashed, a ‘dang’ sound was heard as the tip of the golden saber was actually cut off by the ‘Lady’ sword.

The onlookers were shocked; they could never have predicted that such an ordinary looking blunt sword would actually be so sharp. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were both surprised; they originally picked these weapons because of the names and the fact that they were the same. They couldn’t have known that they had actually picked a pair of precious swords by luck. Their spirits were greatly roused and swords kept on attacking.

Valley Master Gongsun marveled in secret, “Sister Liu and that punk’s martial arts can’t compare with mine. I originally wasn’t afraid of them joining together, but I didn’t

know that when their swords join it would actually be so powerful. It looks like that bald scoundrel was telling the truth. If I lose to these two... if I lose to these two..." When he thought to this point, the saber in his right hand suddenly attacked left and the sword in his right hand swept left, using his greatest skill "Yin Yang Wild Blades". The black sword was originally soft and yin but right now it was hacking and chopping solidly, changing into the yang and hard nature of saber play. Meanwhile, the heavy and clumsy jagged saber was now piercing and cutting, going down the road of lightness and swiftness. The saber had become a sword, the sword had become a saber, and it really was extraordinary.

Jinlun Fawang, Xiaoxiang Zi and Yin Kexi were all knowledgeable people but the "Yin Yang Wild Blades" was something that they've never seen or heard of before.

Ma Guangzuo called out, "Hey, old man, what weird name has this mad kung fu of yours got? The... the... the older you get, the madder you get!"

Valley Master Gongsun was only around forty years of age. Today he had wanted to marry Xiao Longnu and because of this he's been called old man this and that by this dim witted person; how can he not get angry? Right now he had no time for him. Now he used this kung fu that he'd studied bitterly for the last twenty years. He decided to defeat the two of them before doing anything else.

With the two paired using their swordplay, they had begun to gain the upper hand; but the opponent had swapped his weapons around and his stances were extraordinary. The two were put on their back foot and met many dangerous stances over a short period of time. Yang Guo saw that the black sword was stronger than the golden saber; he intercepted all the sword strokes and allowed Xiao Longnu

to face the golden saber. He thought that because she had an advantage in weaponry, the Valley Master wouldn't dare to clash with the 'Lady' sword and so she shouldn't meet any great danger. But by doing this the two were effectively fighting separately; the swordplay of the "Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden" had separated into two and its power immediately decreased.

Valley Master Gongsun was delighted; he unleashed three chops with his black sword while the saber in his left hand used the stances "The Still Yang Needle", "The Form of the Yielding Separates Gold", "The Thorn Pierces Qing" and "The Nine Lotuses". Those four graceful and flowing sword stances were mixed in with the three saber stances. Yang Guo could still block these attacks but Xiao Longnu was getting frantic; she wanted to use the sword to cut off the tip of the saber but the golden saber moved like a flying phoenix, she could not touch it. Yang Guo knew something was wrong and disregarded his safety and used a stance of "The Horse Trampling on the Descending Flowers" from the Quanzhen swordplay, sending the sword from his upper arm aiming upwards, intercepting the opponent's saber and sword. Xiao Longnu immediately took back her sword and protected Yang Guo's upper body. The two once again joined together, returning back to the swordplay of the "Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden". The theory of the swordplay lies in the two users having a mutual affinity for each other, as if two became one. In this stance Yang Guo had forsaken his life to save Xiao Longnu; this was the supreme premise of this swordplay. Xiao Longnu saw his front wasn't guarded while he was saving her; she was afraid that he would get hurt and quickly helped him to protect himself. The two had not protected themselves but both became protected as a result; the power of the swords suddenly increased.

Many more stances passed and beads of sweat could now be seen on the forehead of the Valley Master; his sword and saber stances were wanting and a picture of defeat could be seen on him. On the other hand, Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were becoming more and more fluid in their swordplay. Yang Guo's left hand held the shaft of the sword and his right hand thrust the sword forward to the enemy's waist on the left. Xiao Longnu held the sword handle with both her hands and flicked the sword upwards; this stance was called "Resting Loftily with a Tidy Brow"; the stance was filled with love, tenderness and gracefulness. Her heart was filled with love and passion; she turned her head to look at Yang Guo. Suddenly her chest felt as if a hammer had smashed up against it and the finger on her right hand had broke out in unbearable pain; she almost dropped her sword. Her face changed and she leapt back three steps.

Valley Master Gongsun chuckled, "Ha, the Passion Flower; the Passion Flower!" The pleasure in his heart was greater than his jealousy.

Xiao Longnu did not understand but Yang Guo knew the poison of the Passion Flower had flared up. Her finger had just been pricked by the Passion Flower and as she thought about love, her finger broke out with an unbearable pain.

Yang Guo had tasted this pain before; he was deeply concerned for Xiao Longnu and softly asked, "Does it hurt very much?"

Valley Master Gongsun took this opportunity to launch an attack; he urgently attacked with his sword and saber at Yang Guo. Xiao Longnu's pain had lessened and she raised her sword again. Yang Guo was concerned for her and said, "Rest a little while longer." But as soon as he stirred his love for her, his finger broke out in pain once again.

Valley Master Gongsun took this chance and chopped heavily with the black sword, a 'dang' sound was heard as he knocked the 'Gentleman' sword out of his hand. The black sword extended forward and was once again at his chest.

Xiao Longnu was shocked and tried to save him but she was blocked by the gold saber and had no way to advance.

The Valley Master called out, "Hold that punk." Four disciples in green responded, they walked forward and twisted the net over him, they circled him a few times and held him tightly in the net.

Valley Master Gongsun asked, "Sister Liu, what are you going to do?"

Xiao Longnu knew that she was not a match for him alone; she threw down her 'Lady' sword on the floor and heard a 'ca' sound; the 'Gentleman' sword and 'Lady' sword leapt closer together, joining up tightly. The two swords actually had great magnetism. Xiao Longnu said solemnly, "If the swords can do this how can we not do it? Just kill the two of us."

Valley Master Gongsun gave a 'huh' grunt and said, "Follow me." He folded his arms towards Fawang and the others, saying, "Excuse me!" He turned into the inner halls. The four disciples followed, dragging the net along with Yang Guo. Xiao Longnu followed.

Ma Guangzuo said, "Hey monk, zombie head, we need to think of a way to save them."

Jinlun Fawang just smiled wryly and didn't reply.

Xiaoxiang Zi chuckled and said, "Hey giant, can you beat that old man?"

Ma Guangzuo stroked his cheek and couldn't think of a plan; he just said, "I'll fight even if I can't beat him! I'll fight even if I can't beat him!"

Valley Master Gongsun advanced forward with his head held high; he entered a small stone room and said, "Cut some Passion Flowers for me."

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu had already decided to die; they looked at each other, smiling, and ignoring what Valley Master Gongsun said or did. Not long after, an enchanting fragrance entered the stone room. The two turned their heads to see what it was; there was a fusion of five colors, from tender red to soft yellow; more than ten disciples in green had entered the room carrying bunches of Passion Flowers in their arms. Their arms were covered in leather, protecting them from the thorns of the flowers.

Valley Master Gongsun waved his right arm; he said coldly, "Throw them on that scum."

It was as if ten thousands wasps were stinging Yang Guo; his limbs, his bones, they all were overpowered with unbearable pain; he couldn't take it and called out in pain.

Xiao Longnu felt pity and anger; she shouted at Valley Master Gongsun, "What are you doing?" She dashed forward wanting to remove the Passion Flowers from Yang Guo.

Valley Master Gongsun stretched out his hand to block her and said, "Sister Liu, today is the day when we would have consummated our marriage; but this punk entered the valley and ruined everything. We do not know each other and we have no debts or feuds; but you and he know each other. If he had acted courteously and respectfully as a guest, of course I would have treated him with great respect; now that it has come to this..." He then waved his

left hand out and sent his disciples away. He closed the door. He continued, "Whether it'll end up in tragedy or joy, it will be up to you."

The pain that Yang Guo was in was indescribable but he didn't want Xiao Longnu to get upset so he clenched his teeth and didn't make a sound. None of the words of Valley Master Gongsun entered his ears as he endured the pain.

When Xiao Longnu saw the suffering he was in; her pity was roused and as soon as this happened, the Passion Flower poison in her finger flared up and she felt the excruciating pain again. She thought, "I've only been pierced once by the Passion Flower and it is already this painful; but he's covered with thousands and thousands of thorns, how can he stand it?"

Valley Master Gongsun knew what she was thinking and said, "Sister Liu, I sincerely want to marry and be with you; I have only admiration and love for you, I have no ill intent, you should understand this."

Xiao Longnu nodded her head and said mournfully, "You have treated me well all along; but even if we met before you saved me and you treated me like an empress you wouldn't be able to win my heart." She hung her head for a short while and then gave a long sigh; she said, "Mr. Gongsun, if you hadn't seen me that day by the mountainside, if you hadn't saved me and had let me die there, it would have been better for the three of us. You know that forcing me to marry you will result in a lifetime of unhappiness for me. What good is that to you?"

Valley Master Gongsun's eyebrows slowly rose again; he deepened his voice and said, "I have always been a man of my word; I don't allow people to insult or lie to me. Since you've agreed to marry me, you have to marry me. When it

comes to happiness, sadness, joy and pain, the future is hard to predict; who knows what tomorrow may bring? Let's just see what happens." He waved his sleeve and said, "This person has been pricked by the Passion Flowers all over his body; the suffering will deepen every two hours; thirty six days from now he will die in excruciating pain. I have a medicine that I can give to him which will cure him within twenty four hours; but after a day, even a god won't be able to save him. It's up to you whether he lives or dies." He walked slowly towards the door and pushed it open; he turned his head and said, "If you'd rather watch him die slowly then you can stay here and watch him for the next thirty six days; it's up to you. I won't harm you so you can relax. If you change your decision within twenty four hours, all you've got to do is give a shout and I will bring the antidote to him." He was about to leave the room.

Xiao Longnu saw that Yang Guo was trembling all over; his lips were bleeding because of him biting down in pain; his eyes had been as bright as a shooting star, but now there was not even a single speck of light in them. The pain that he was in now was already unbearable; but the pain would deepen every two hours for the next thirty six days; even hell wouldn't have such a punishment. She bit down on her lip and said, "Mr. Gongsun, I'll agree to marry you. Quickly let him go and give him the antidote."

Valley Master Gongsun had been trying to force her to say this all along; when he heard this he was delighted but also resentful. He knew that from now on, she would detest him and loathe him. She would never have any love towards him so he nodded his head and said, "It's for the benefit of everyone that you have changed your mind. After we've consummated our marriage tonight, I'll give him the antidote in the morning."

Xiao Longnu said, "First cure him."

The Valley Master sighed and said, "Sister Liu, you think too little of me. I know that agreeing to this is not what you want; even if I was stupid, how would I not know? Do you think I would cure him first?" He turned to leave the room.

Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo looked at each miserably, neither one saying a word for a while. Yang Guo said slowly, "Gu Gu, even when I'm down in the underworld I will feel no pain because of your love. Just kill me with one palm!"

Xiao Longnu thought, "I'll first kill him with one palm and then commit suicide." So she raised her hand and gathered internal energy in her palm.

Yang Guo's face had a smile, his eyes soft and peaceful; looking at her sweetly, he whispered, "This is where we'll consummate our love."

Xiao Longnu saw his air was glorious; she thought, "Why is heaven so cruel towards such a handsome and graceful man, wanting him to die today." Her chest ached and suddenly she tasted sweetness at the back of her throat; it appeared that she would throw up blood again and the internal energy in her arm immediately dissipated. Suddenly, she threw herself on top of Yang Guo; the thousands and thousands of thorns of the Passion Flower pierced her body; she said, "Guo'er, we'll endure the suffering together."

Valley Master Gongsun called out, "Oh no!" in shock, he said, "You... you..." He then said coldly, "Why did you do this? Will your suffering lessen his?"

Xiao Longnu took one deep look at Yang Guo, then slowly turned around. She exited the room and didn't look back.

Valley Master Gongsun said, "Brother Yang, I'll give you the antidote in twenty hours time. All you've got to do in these

twenty hours is cleanse your thoughts and don't rouse any feelings of love. Even if there is pain, it won't be that hard to endure." He then left the room and closed the door.

Yang Guo's body was wracked with pain and his heart was full of hurt. "All the pain and suffering that I've experience before today is nothing compared to the pain I'm experiencing now. The Valley Master is such an evil person; how can I just die like this and let Gu Gu suffer at his hands? Besides, I still have to avenge my father; how can I allow the phony, righteous and benevolent Guo Jing and Huang Rong to not get what they deserve for their evil deed?" When he thought about this, his blood boiled, shaking and stirring him, "I cannot die; whatever happens I cannot die! Even if Gu Gu becomes the wife of the Valley Master I'd still need to save her. I need to train my martial arts and avenge my father." So he clenched his teeth and sat up. Although he couldn't assume the proper form in the fish net, he was still able to submerge his chi into his dan tian and started to circulate his internal energy.

Four hours later, midday had passed. A disciple in green entered with a plate; there were four new buns on it. The disciple said, "Our master is celebrating his wedding and he's allowing you to have a good meal." The disciple placed the plate by the fish net; his hand was covered with a coarse cloth to avoid getting injured by the passion flowers. As Yang Guo stretched out his hand through the net for the buns and ate them, he thought, "Since I'm going to fight with my life against that bastard Valley Master, I can't torture myself."

The disciple laughed, "I couldn't have guessed that you would have such a great appetite."

Suddenly there was a green blur by the door; another disciple had come through the door and had moved up

silently behind the first disciple. That disciple threw a heavy punch against the first disciple's back. The disciple fainted before he could see who threw the punch.

Yang Guo saw that the person who did the sneak attack was actually Gongsun Lu'E; he said with surprise, "You... you..."

Gongsun Lu'E first turned around and closed the door before whispering, "Quiet brother Yang, I've come to rescue you." She untied the knots of the net and cleared the Passion Flowers away from Yang Guo, letting him out. Her hands were covered with a thick piece of cloth.

Yang Guo hesitated, "If your father finds out about this..."

Gongsun Lu'E said, "I'll ignore whatever heavy punishment I'll get." She picked up a Passion Flower and placed it in the mouth of the unconscious disciple so that he won't be able to call for help when he wakes up. Then she placed him in the fish net and threw the Passion Flowers over him. She whispered again, "Brother Yang, hide behind the door if someone enters. I'll go and get the antidote for your poison from the pill room."

Yang Guo was extremely touched. He knew that she was putting herself in danger by doing this; his friendship with her was not even a day old and she's actually rebelling against her father to rescue him. He said, "Miss, I... I..." He was so touched that he couldn't say anything.

Gongsun Lu'E smiled at him and said, "Just wait here for a little while, I'll be right back." She then left the room.

Yang Guo was lost in thought, "Why is she treating me so well? Though I've had an unfortunate life and suffered under other people ever since I was small, there are actually many people who have treated me sincerely. There's no need to mention Gu Gu; there's Grandma Sun,

Hong Qigong, my Godfather Ouyang Feng and Island Master Huang. There's also the girls Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang, and now's there's Gongsun Lu'E as well amongst them; all of them have treated me with great sincerity. My birth date and time must be of an extremely strange nature; otherwise how could those who've been good to me treat me so well and those who've been cruel to me have treated me so badly?" But he never thought about how all his encounters have been extraordinary; the people he meets either treat him with great sincerity or treat him with extreme insincerity. His character was such that he would only get on well with those who could agree with him; those whose words clashed with his, he treated as an enemy. How he treated others was, of course, how others repaid him.

He waited for a long while but Gongsun Lu'E still had not returned. Yang Guo was getting more and more worried. At first he thought that there must have been someone else present in the pill room so she couldn't steal the antidote. But as time went by, he thought that even if she couldn't steal the antidote, she would have come back and told him so. It looks like something must have gone terribly wrong; she took such a big risk for me, how can I not try to save her? He opened the door slightly and peeked out. It was quiet outside and there was no one around; he slipped out but he did not know where Gongsun Lu'E might be.

Just as he was hesitating, he suddenly heard footsteps from around the corner; he quickly hid behind the corner and saw two disciples in green passing by shoulder to shoulder. In their hands was a thorny stick; it appeared that it was something that was used for punishment.

Yang Guo was furious, "Gu Gu would rather die than submit, and that shameless Valley Master is actually trying to force her to submit through torture!" He lightened his

steps and followed the two disciples. The two disciples did not notice him; they turned and twisted along a few corridors before arriving outside a stone room. They said clearly, "Master, the thorny stick is here." They pushed open the door and entered.

Yang Guo's heart raced; he saw that there was a window on the eastern side of the room and ran over to it. He looked inside and saw that it wasn't Xiao Longnu; it was Gongsun Lu'E who was standing in front of her father with her head hanging down. The Valley Master was sitting in the middle of the room while two disciples were holding long swords in their hands, guarding the left and right of Gongsun Lu'E.

The Valley Master took the thorny stick and said coldly, "E'er, you're my own flesh and blood; why did you betray me?"

Gongsun Lu'E lowered her head and didn't say anything.

The Valley Master said, "Do you think I don't know that you've fallen for the one named Yang? I said I was going to let him go; why were you so anxious? When I see him tomorrow I'll betroth you to him, how about that?"

How would Yang Guo not know how Gongsun Lu'E felt about him; but right now when it was said aloud in public, his heart raced.

Gongsun Lu'E still did not say anything and kept her head lowered. After a while, she lifted her head and said clearly, "Father, all you're thinking about right now is your marriage; what time you do have for your daughter?"

Valley Master Gongsun gave a 'heng' grunt and didn't say anything.

Gongsun Lu'E continued, "You are correct; I admire master Yang's decency and honesty, his passion and righteousness. But I know that there is only Miss Long in his heart. I saved him because... because I can't stand what you have done; it is not because of him."

Yang Guo was extremely moved by this and thought, "This scoundrel is so cruel and violent, yet he has a daughter who is so kind and righteous."

Valley Master Gongsun's face was unmoved. There were no signs of being angry on his face as he said dryly, "So according to you, I'm not an honest person; someone who's not righteous and who's not passionate?"

Gongsun Lu'E said, "I do not dare to describe father this way. But... but..."

The Valley Master said, "But what?"

Gongsun Lu'E said, "Master Yang has been pierced by thousands and thousands of Passion Flower thorns; how can he withstand the suffering? Father, you're merciful and kind, just let him go."

The Valley Master chuckled, "I'm going to let him go tomorrow. I don't need you to be so meddlesome."

Gongsun Lu'E tilted her head and pondered; appearing as if she was weighing up whether she should say the words she had on her mind. Eventually her face became resolute and she said, "Father, you're the one who raised me; that master Yang is an outsider I've just met; how can I betray you and help him? If father was really going to let him go and cure his poison, why would I need to take the great risk of going to the pill room?"

Valley Master Gongsun said sternly, "Then why did you go there?"

Gongsun Lu'E said, "I know that you have ill intent towards him. After you've forced Miss Long to marry you, you will kill master Yang to end Miss Long's longing.

Valley Master Gongsun's eyebrows raised again; he said coldly, "Huh, it looks like I've reared an ill boding tiger. I brought you up and here you are now, biting back at me. Give it!" He stretched out his hand.

Lu E said, "What does father want?"

The Valley Master said, "You're still playing dumb? I want the Passionless Pill that cures the poison of the Passion Flower."

Lu E said, "I did not take it."

The Valley Master stood up and said, "Then where did it go?"

Yang Guo examined the room; he saw the cupboards were lined with bottles of medicine and there were countless herbs hung on the wall. In the western side of the room were three pill cauldrons. This room looks like none other than that so called pill room. From the expression of Valley Master Gongsun, it appeared that Gongsun Lu'E would definitely face a heavy punishment.

He heard her say, "Father, it's true, I entered the pill room by myself because I wanted to find the Passionless Pill for master Yang. But I searched for half a day and still couldn't find it, otherwise, would I have been found out by father?"

Valley Master Gongsun said sternly, "The place where I hide this medicine is extremely secretive. The outsiders have stayed in the hall and have not left it. The Passionless Pill

has suddenly disappeared; could it be that the pill grew legs and ran away?"

Lu E knelt on the floor and cried, "Father, spare master Yang's life; just tell him not to enter the valley again and leave it at that."

The Valley Master chuckled, "If it was my life on the line, I don't think you would kneel on the floor and beg someone to save me."

Lu E didn't reply and just hugged his knees.

The Valley Master said, "You took the Passionless Pill; how can I save him now? Fine, if you don't want to admit it that's up to you. You can wait here for a day. Though you've stolen the pill, if you can't get it to him, it will be of no use. I'll let you go in twenty four hours!" He then advanced to the doors.

Gongsun Lu'E bit down as she said, "Father!"

The Valley Master said, "You've got something else to say?"

She pointed to the four disciples in green and said, "First dismiss them."

The Valley Master said, "My valley is united as one; there's nothing that's said that can't be said in front of the others."

Gongsun Lu'E's face went red and then immediately turned white. She said, "Fine, since you don't believe my words then you need to see whether I have it on me." She then began to take off her gown and skirt. The Valley Master quickly waved the disciples out and closed the door. After a short while, Gongsun Lu'E had taken off her gown and skirt and was now left with her undergarments. Indeed, she had nothing on her.

Yang Guo's heart jumped when he saw her white gleaming body. He was a young man and Gongsun Lu'E had an attractive figure, her appearance elegant; his blood raced but then he immediately thought, "Because she's trying to save my life, she didn't hesitate to unclothe herself. Yang Guo ah Yang Guo, if you take another look you're worse than an animal."

He quickly closed his eyes but just as he was feeling troubled and confused, his forehead lightly knocked into the frame of the window.

Though only a faint noise was produced, Valley Master Gongsun noticed it; he went over to the three pill cauldrons and pushed the middle one out of the way. He moved the one in the east to the middle, he moved the one in the west to the east and finally he moved the one that was originally in the middle to the west. He said, "Since it's like this, I'll promise you to spare that punk's life."

Gongsun Lu'E was delighted and bowed, she quivered, "Father!"

The Valley Master sat down on a chair by the wall and said, "You know the rules of the valley. What is the punishment for entering the pill room without permission?"

Lu E lowered her head and said, "Death."

The Valley Master sighed and said, "Though you are my daughter, I cannot break the rules of the valley, go in peace!" He drew out his black sword and raised it in midair; he said softly, "E'er, if you stop pleading for the one named Yang then I'll spare you. I can only spare one of you, you or him?"

Gongsun Lu'E said quietly, "Him!"

Valley Master Gongsun said, "Fine, my daughter really is kind and righteous; much better than her father." He waved his sword out and chopped downwards towards her head.

Yang Guo was shocked and called out, "Wait!" He leapt in through the window as he called out, "You should kill me!" His right foot touched the floor and he was about to stretch out his hand to grab the Valley Master's wrist to stop the black sword from chopping down when the sole of his foot felt soft as if he was treading on thin air. Yang Guo knew something was wrong; he quickly roused his chi and his body leapt up. Valley Master Gongsun pushed his daughter on the shoulders with his palms. Gongsun Lu'E's body quickly went backwards, knocking into Yang Guo.

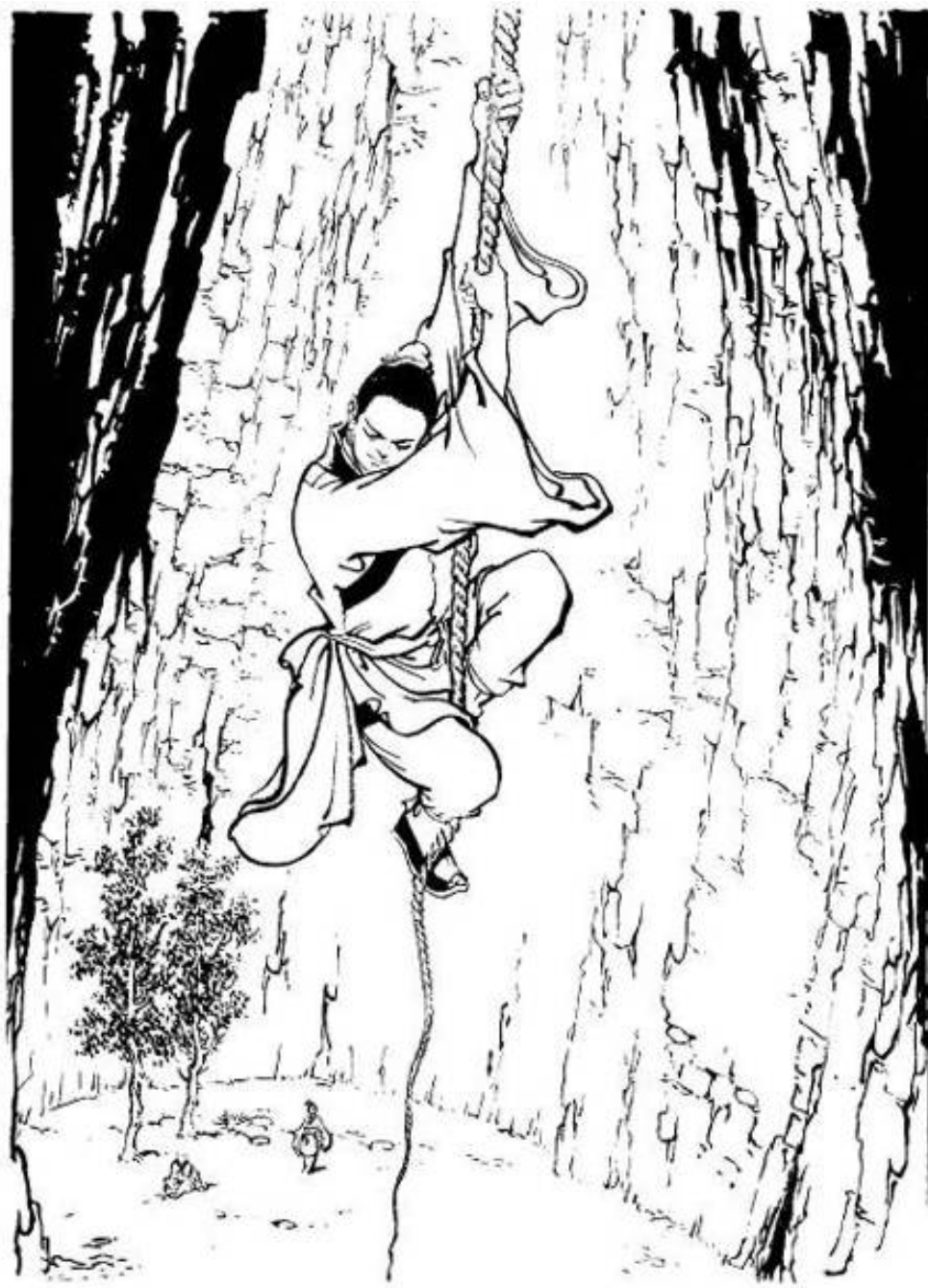
After he leapt back up, of course, he went back down. Gongsun Lu'E had knocked right into his body and the two of them dropped straight down. There was nothing under their feet and they had yet to reach solid ground even after falling for hundreds of feet.

Though Yang Guo was frightened, he still remembered he had to protect the life of Gongsun Lu'E; he quickly held Gongsun Lu'E in his hands. There was just darkness in front of him; he didn't know what they would land on; a mountain of knives or a forest of swords? Or would it be boulders or rocks? Before his thoughts were finished, a 'pu tong' sound was heard as the two fell into water, sinking downwards swiftly; there was actually a deep pool below the pill room.

End of Chapter 18.

Chapter 19 - The Old Woman Underground

Translated by Noodles



Yang Guo grabbed the rope with both hands and climbed up it; he looked down and saw that Luu E

and her mother had become two small black images in the indistinct evening light.

Falling hundreds of feet like this on to solid ground could only result in death; but as soon as Yang Guo felt himself splashing into water, he was delighted; he knew that his life was not in danger. The current was strong and he had plunged deep into the water; he felt himself sinking downwards without end as if the water was depthless. He held his breath and waited until he slowed down before he swam upwards with his right hand while holding Lu'E in his left hand. As soon as he reached the surface he took a breath and a sudden stench filled his nose; at the same time, the water on his left was breaking in waves, as if some large aquatic animal was coming towards them to attack.

A thought went through his mind, "That scoundrel trapped us down here, how can it be something good?" With his right hand he chopped a fierce palm towards the left side. A loud sound was heard as he struck a large solid object; a fierce turbulent wave followed. Yang Guo used the force from his palm to move to the right with Gongsun Lu'E.

He wasn't a great swimmer; the reason why he was able to last so long underwater was because he used his internal energy to hold his breath. It was pitch black; all he heard was urgent splashing sounds from behind and to the left of him. He sent his right hand out and suddenly brushed against a cold and coarse object. It appeared to be the scales of that creature, he was shocked, "Could it be that there's such a thing as a Venom Dragon in this world?" He used the force in his hand and soared upwards with the strange creature forced under water by him. He took a deep breath, since he planned to dive underwater once

again; but his right foot actually landed on solid ground. He wasn't prepared for this and the impact on his leg was all wrong; his right leg was in great pain.

But he was too happy to care about the pain in his leg; he stretched out his hand to examine the surroundings and found a rock face by the pool. He was afraid that the strange creature would continue its attack so he quickly climbed to higher ground. Once he sat down, he became calmer. Gongsun Lu'E had swallowed a few mouthfuls of water and she was half conscious. Yang Guo rested her on his lap and let her throw up the water. Then he heard scraping sounds on the rocks and a stench that was gradually becoming stronger and stronger; a few of the strange creatures from the pool had climbed out.

Gongsun Lu'E sat up and hugged Yang Guo's neck; alarmed she said, "What's that?"

Yang Guo said, "Don't be afraid; hide behind me."

Gongsun Lu'E didn't move, she just held him tighter and quivered, "Crocodiles, crocodiles!"

When Yang Guo was living on Peach Blossom Island, he had seen countless crocodiles on the island; he knew that they were extremely vicious and violent, much more than the tigers and wolves of the land. One day, he, Guo Fu and the Wu brothers saw them but they didn't try to annoy them and kept their distance from them. Today unexpectedly, he had come across some crocodiles in this underground pool. He listened carefully and from the sounds, he could tell that there were three crocodiles getting closer step by step.

Gongsun Lu'E whispered, "Brother Yang, who would have thought that you and I would die in such a place?" Her voice was full of joy and comfort.

Yang Guo laughed, "Even if we are going to die, we first need to kill a few crocodiles before doing anything else."

At that time, the first crocodile was already within ten feet of Yang Guo's leg; Lu'E called out, "Hit it quickly!"

Yang Guo said; "Just a little longer." He stretched out his right foot and hung it down by his side; the crocodile advanced a few feet and opened its mouth, biting viciously at his leg. Yang Guo pulled his leg back and sent out a kick, striking the crocodile squarely in the jaw. The crocodile somersaulted in the air and landed back in the pool. The pool splashed and the other crocodiles in it clamored; but the other two crocodiles kept on advancing.

Though Yang Guo was poisoned by the Passion Flowers, his martial arts had not been affected in any way; the kick he just performed had a force of hundreds of kilos behind it. After he kicked the crocodile his foot ached slightly. However, the crocodile that he kicked was still moving freely after it landed back in the pool. He thought, "I can't do anything to all these crocodiles empty-handed; if I continue like this me and Miss Gongsun will eventually end up in their stomachs. I must think of something else; how can I kill all these crocodiles?" He stretched out his hand in search of a large rock to use as a weapon; but there wasn't anything on the rock face, not even a speck of sand. He heard the other two crocodiles getting closer and quickly asked, "Have you got a sword with you?"

Gongsun Lu'E said, "With me?" She remembered how she took off her gown and dress; all she was wearing now was her underwear. Now, she was in the arms of Yang Guo; she immediately became embarrassed and her body flushed with heat. But deep in her heart, there was a sweet feeling of joy.

Yang Guo was just worried about being attacked by the crocodiles at the moment; he did not notice anything wrong with her. He heard the two crocodiles were now within ten feet of him, and there were another two behind him. It would be of no use to send out a palm and knock them back into the pool; after a short while they would come back again. It would just be a waste of effort; so he gathered energy and waited for the crocodiles to get within three feet of him before sending out both palms, striking the crocodiles on the head. The crocodiles weren't that swift in turning and they couldn't move out the way when the palms arrived. But their skin was thick; they were just knocked unconscious and slipped back into the pool. Just at that time, the other two crocodiles behind him arrived; Yang Guo kicked one off the rock face with his left foot. The kick was very heavy; he could not hold Gongsun Lu'E steady and she slanted to the side, slipping downwards off the rock face.

Gongsun Lu'E called out in shock; her right hand braced against the rock face and she circulated her internal energy to leap back up. Yang Guo stretched out a hand to grab her and pulled her back up. This setback allowed the other crocodile to press close to him; it opened its jaws and bit down towards Yang Guo's shoulders. There wasn't enough time to punch or kick it away, he could only move out of its way. As soon as its jaws close, it might actually bite down on Lu'E. With this danger in mind he quickly sent out both hands; one pulled the upper jaw and the other pulled the lower; he circulated his internal energy and gave a shout, a cracking sound was heard as the jaws of the crocodile snapped and it immediately died.

Though Yang Guo had killed this vicious crocodile, his back had broken out in a cold sweat.

Lu'E said, "Are you hurt?"

Yang Guo heard her voice was gentle and concerned; his heart was moved slightly and he said, "No." But the force he had just used was too ferocious and his arms ached.

Lu'E observed that the crocodile was not moving and was lying there on the rock dead; she was in awe of Yang Guo and said, "How did you kill that crocodile empty-handed? And how can you see so clearly in this darkness?"

Yang Guo said, "I've lived with my Gu Gu for many years in the ancient tomb; all I need is the faintest light and I'll be able to see things." When he mentioned living in the tomb with his Gu Gu, he couldn't stop himself from letting out a sigh. Suddenly an excruciating pain broke out in his body. It was extremely difficult to endure, and he hollered and shouted and at the same time, he kicked the dead crocodile back into the pool.

Two crocodiles were climbing up onto the rock face just at that time; when they heard his inhuman calls, they were so frightened that they slipped back into the water. Gongsun Lu'E quickly held his arm and with her other hand, brushed across his forehead gently, hoping that she would be able to lessen his pain.

Yang Guo knew that even if he hadn't fallen into this dangerous situation, he would not live for more than a couple of days because of the poison; he had heard the Valley Master say that the pain would keep on increasing over the next thirty-six days before he finally died. The pain was so unbearable that even if he endured it a few more times, he'd eventually give in to the pain and kill himself. But when he dies, Gongsun Lu'E will have no one to protect her; that would be terrible for her and he thought, "The reason she's in this danger is because of me. No matter what pain I'm in I must endure it; hopefully the Valley Master will still have some love for his daughter and will

come to save her." As he thought about this, his thoughts of Xiao Longnu disappeared for the time being and the pain lessened; he said, "Miss Gongsun, don't be afraid, I think that your father will come for you. He hates me only and has always loved you; he must be feeling very regretful right now."

Gongsun Lu'E cried, "When my mother was alive, father really did love me. But after mother died, he became cold towards me. However, I know that... I know that in his heart he doesn't hate me." She stopped for a while and thought of many strange and hard-to-explain things; she said, "Brother Yang, I've suddenly thought of something; my father has always been afraid of me."

Yang Guo said surprised, "He's afraid of you? That's strange."

Lu'E said, "I just feel that whenever my father sees me he doesn't seem to be at ease; it's like he's got something hidden in his heart and is afraid that I will find out about it. Over the past few years, he's been avoiding me and doesn't want to see me."

She had noticed that her father's expression had been strange; though she wondered about this, she reached the same conclusion every time; the reason he's changed is because he was deeply hurt by her mother's passing away. But this time, falling into the crocodile pit was definitely her father's plan. He had moved the pill cauldrons in the pill room to activate the collapsing floor. If her father hated Yang Guo and wanted to kill him, all he had to do was keep the antidote for the Passion Flower poison away from him and he would have little chance of living. Now that Yang Guo had fallen into the crocodile pit, the chance of him escaping death was next to none; so why did her father push her into the crocodile pit as well? What fatherly love

was there in that push? This wasn't a slip due to anger, he had planned this. The more she thought about it, the sadder she became because it was becoming clearer and clearer to her. There were many words and actions of her father that she did not understand and just used the reason 'eccentric behavior' to explain it all. Right now, as she thought, it appeared that the word 'fear' was more apt. Her father fearing her was something that she could never have conceived.

The crocodile pool broke out in a thrashing roar as all the crocodiles fought over the dead crocodile; they'd stopped climbing up onto the rock face for the time being.

Yang Guo saw that she was deep in thought and asked, "Maybe your father has some kind of hidden secret and you've somehow stumbled upon it by accident?"

Lu'E shook her head and said, "No. My father's actions are honorable; he is very fair, and everyone in the valley had great respect for him. His treatment of you really is wrong; but he has never done such uncharacteristic things like this before."

Yang Guo did not know about the past affairs of the Passionless Valley and so it was hard for him to help her guess what the reasons were behind all this.

The crocodile pool was deep underground and was cold like an ice cave; the two were wet and felt the effects even more. Yang Guo had trained on the Chilled Jade Bed and took no notice of such insignificant coldness; but Gongsun Lu'E kept on shivering and searching for warmth in Yang Guo's arms. Yang Guo knew that this girl would be feeling frightened and sad right now; as he watched the struggle in the crocodile pool he wanted to make her laugh. The crocodiles were opening their mouths and showing vicious

teeth, looking extremely terrifying, so he laughed, "Miss Gongsun, we're going to die together today; when you reincarnate in the next life, what do you want to reincarnate as? Whatever happens, I don't want to change into one of these unsightly crocodiles."

Gongsun Lu'E smiled a little and said, "Then you should change into a narcissus flower; it's beautiful and fragrant, and it's something that everyone loves."

Yang Guo laughed, "The only types of people who are worthy of changing into those kind of flowers are people like you. If it's me, I'll get changed into some ugly daisy or chrysanthemum."

Lu'E laughed, "If the Yan Luo Wang (ruler of hell) tells you to change into a Passion Flower, would you?"

Yang Guo was silent and did not reply. He was feeling great resentment and thought, "With Gu Gu's and my "Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden Sword", that scoundrel is not our match. At the time he was on his back foot he was about to lose. But things had to happen this way. Gu Gu had been pierced by the Passion Flower in the sword room. When we were about to use swordplay which requires the users to be as one and to be filled with love to make use of its power, the poison prevented it. This is fate; I can't do anything about it. I wonder how Gu Gu is right now?" As soon as he thought about Xiao Longnu again, his body broke out in pain all over.

When Gongsun Lu'E heard him stay silent, she knew that she shouldn't have mentioned the Passion Flower; she quickly changed the subject and said, "Brother Yang, you're able to see the crocodiles while all I see in front of me is darkness."

Yang Guo laughed, "The crocodiles are extremely ugly, it's better not to see them." He patted her on the back gently to console her; but as soon as he touched her, he felt something cold, smooth and soft. Then he remembered how she undressed herself in front of her father in the pill room. She only had on her underwear; her shoulders and neck were uncovered. Yang Guo was slightly alarmed and quickly pulled back his hand. Lu'E thought about how he could see things in the dark; her semi clothed self would be seen clearly by him and she couldn't stop herself from calling out 'Oh no!' She automatically moved away a little.

Yang Guo sat a little distance away from her and took off his gown to cover her with. As he took it off, not only did he think about Xiao Longnu, but he also thought about Cheng Ying who made a gown for him and Lu Wushuang who was willing to die for him. He blamed himself for letting down the kindness of all these beautiful girls, and he felt guilt for not being able to repay them. He couldn't stop himself from letting out a long sigh.

Gongsun Lu'E straightened the gown and tied the belt around herself. Suddenly she felt a small package in the gown's pockets; she took it out and handed it over to Yang Guo, saying, "What's this? Do you need it?"

Yang Guo took it in his hands and felt that it was fairly heavy; he said, "What is this?"

Lu'E laughed, "I found it in your pockets, why are you asking me about it?"

Yang Guo looked at it and saw that it was a small package covered in rough cloth; he had never seen it before and immediately opened it. There was a sudden light in front of his eyes; four objects were within that package. One of them was a little dagger; on the handle was a pearl of the

size of a long yan stone. It glimmered and sparkled, the light shining on Gongsun Lu'E's graceful face; he thought, "People say that pearls are lights of the night, it appears that this isn't a lie."

Lu'E suddenly screamed, "Yi!" She stretched out her hand towards the package and picked up a small emerald colored jar; she called out, "This is the Passionless Pill."

Yang Guo was shocked and delighted; he asked, "This is the medicine that cures the poison of the Passion Flowers?"

Lu'E shook the jar a few times and felt that something was in the jar. She said with delight, "Yes, I was looking for this in the pill room for half a day; when did you take it? How did you take it? How come you haven't taken it yet? You don't know that this is the Passionless Pill, right?" In her delight, her questions were non-stop, not allowing Yang Guo any time to reply.

Yang Guo scratched his head and said, "I don't know anything about this, this... this jar of medicine; how did it get into my pockets? This really is strange."

In the light of the pearl on the dagger, Lu'E could see clearly what other things were in the package. Besides the dagger and the emerald colored jar of the Passionless Pill, there was a square piece of sheep skin about seven or eight inches in length and half of a Spirit Fungus (Lingzhi). A thought went through her mind and she said, "This piece of Spirit Fungus was the piece that was broken off by the Old Urchin."

Yang Guo said, "The Old Urchin?"

Lu'E said, "Yes. I'm in charge of the fungi room and this is the fungus from the 'Hundred Jade Plate'. The Old Urchin turned the sword, pill, fungi and library rooms upside down.

He destroyed books and stole swords; he kicked over the cauldrons and ripped up the fungi; this is all the handiwork of the Old Urchin."

Yang Guo suddenly understood and said, "Yes, yes."

Lu'E quickly asked, "What?"

Yang Guo said, "This package was placed on me by Senior Zhou Lao." He now knew that Zhou Botong had the intention of aiding him; because of this, he changed his naming of 'Old Urchin' to 'Senior Zhou Lao'.

It also became clear to Lu'E, she said, "So he gave it to you."

Yang Guo said, "I didn't even know that he gave it to me. This Wulin Senior does as he pleases in the world; his movements are mysterious. When he took my mask and scissors I didn't notice it; when he put this package on me I felt nothing. My abilities are not even half as good as his."

Lu'E nodded and said, "Yes, father said that he stole things from the valley and said that he must be captured but... but he took off all his clothes in front of so many people and showed that there was nothing on him."

Yang Guo laughed, "He had hidden the package on me before that and actually managed to deceive the Valley Master by taking off his clothes."

Lu'E opened the emerald colored jar and covered it with her left hand, shaking the contents into the palm of her hand. A square looking pill came out of the jar onto her palm; the pill was extremely dark and its smell was overpowering. Most pills are round so one can easily swallow it; but if it was from a slab of medicine, it will be long and flat.

Yang Guo had never seen a square pill before; he took the pill from Lu'E and examined it closely.

Lu'E shook the jar a few times again and patted the jar into her palm a few times before saying, "That's it, there's only one pill; take it now, it'll be terrible if it falls into the pool."

Yang Guo was about to put the pill in his mouth when he heard her say 'there's only one pill', he was stunned and asked, "Only one? Has your father got any more?"

Lu'E said, "That's why it is so precious; because there is only one pill. Otherwise why would my father get so angry?"

Yang Guo was shocked and quivered, "My Gu Gu has this poison as well; how will your father save her?"

Lu'E sighed, "I once heard from my senior apprentice brother that there were originally many Passionless Pills in the pill room; but for some reason, there was only one left. This pill is extremely hard to produce; there was no way to gather all the precious herbs and medicine to make any more. Because of this, my senior apprentice brother warned us that we must be extremely careful of the Passion Flower; if it's a little pierce from it, one will recover from it after a few days; if that happens it's not too serious. But if the poison is deep, it will be difficult for the Valley Master to act because one pill can only save one person."

Yang Guo kept on saying 'Oh no' and then said, "How come your father hasn't come to save you yet?"

Lu'E immediately knew what he was thinking and saw him placing the pill back into the jar; she let out a light sigh and said, "Brother Yang, how can my father feel no shame in light of your love for Miss Long? You're hoping that I'll be able to take the pill back up and save Miss Long's life."

Yang Guo showed a little smile as his thoughts were revealed, he said, "Of course I hoped that such a kind girl as you will leave this dangerous place safely; but I also hope that my Gu Gu's life can be saved. Even if I cure my Passion Flower poison, I won't last long if I stay down here in this crocodile pit. Of course saving my Gu Gu is more important." He thought, "Gu Gu's beauty is unparalleled; it's normal that someone like the Valley Master would want to marry her. But when Gu Gu refused to marry him, he lured her to the sword room to harm her. He really is evil; now he knows that the only Passionless Pill has been taken away, there is no way to cure the Passion Flower poison in Gu Gu. She just has thirty six days to live and all he's concerned about is making her submit to him; even the crocodiles in this pit have more heart than him."

Lu'E knew that no matter how hard she tries to persuade him to take the pill it will be of no use; she regretted telling him that there was only one pill so she said, "This Spirit Fungus can't cure poisons but it can strengthen one's body, eat it quickly."

Yang Guo said, "Yes." He broke the piece of Spirit Fungus into two; he put one piece into his mouth and put the other piece in front of Lu'E's mouth, he said, "We don't know when your father will let you go, so eat this piece to help protect yourself against this cold."

Lu'E saw that he was concerned for her and couldn't bear to refuse, so she opened her mouth.

This Spirit Fungus had been grown for hundreds of years; not long after the two ate it, they felt an extremely comfortable warmth throughout their bodies, a boost in their energy and they felt sharper.

Lu'E suddenly said, "Father must have known that Zhou Botong had stolen the Passionless Pill. He was lying to Miss Long when he said he was going to cure you; and when he was forcing me to hand over the Passionless Pill, he was acting then as well."

Yang Guo had thought about this awhile ago but he didn't want to make her sadder so he kept quiet about it. When he heard her realizing this on her own he said, "When your father let's you out, you need to be extremely careful; the best thing for you to do is leave the valley as quickly as possible."

Lu'E sighed, "You don't know my father; since he's pushed me down here into this crocodile pit he will never change his mind and rescue me. He was already worried about me; after this event, how can he allow me to live? Brother Yang, will you let me die with you?"

Yang Guo was about to say a few words to comfort her when he suddenly heard another crocodile climbing onto the rock face, its front foot stepping onto sheepskin from the package. Yang Guo had a thought, "That sheepskin looked kind of strange." He picked up the dagger and stabbed it between the eyes of the crocodile; a 'pu' sound was heard as it went straight through. The dagger that he was holding was actually extremely sharp and was capable of chopping gold and cutting jade. The crocodile struggled a little bit before falling back into the pool on its back, dead. Yang Guo said with delight, "Now that we've got this dagger, those crocodiles in the pool have run out of luck."

He picked up the sheepskin with his left hand and brought the dagger over, using the faint light from the pearl to carefully study it. The sheepskin was coarse on one side and there was nothing odd about it; but turning it over revealed drawings of many buildings, rooms, rocks and the like.

Yang Guo looked at it for a while but didn't find anything strange about it, he said, "This sheepskin is of no use to us."

Lu'E had been looking over his shoulder all along and suddenly said, "That's a map of our Narcissus Manor of the Passionless Valley. Look, that's the brook that led you here, that's the main hall, that's the sword room, that's the fungi room and that's the pill room..." She pointed to the map as she said this.

Yang Guo suddenly called out and said, "Look, look." He pointed to a drawing of water underneath the pill room.

Lu'E said, "That's the crocodile pool. Ah... there's a passageway here."

The two could see that there was a passageway drawn next to the crocodile pool and their spirits rose. Yang Guo matched the map to the crocodile pool and said, "If the map's right, after passing through the passageway there'll definitely be an exit. But..."

Lu'E interrupted, "But what's strange is that the passageway is going downwards; this crocodile pool is already deep underground; where will the passageway lead if it keeps on going further down?" The passageway on the map finished at the edge of the sheepskin, they didn't know where it leads.

Yang Guo said, "Has your father or senior apprentice brother ever mentioned this crocodile pool before?"

Lu'E shook her head and said, "I only learned today that there were so many terrifying things hidden underneath the pill room; even senior apprentice brother may not know about it. But... but to keep all these crocodiles alive will require regular feeding, why does father..." She trembled all over as she thought about how evil her father was.

Yang Guo took a look around and noticed a dark circular shape behind the rock face; it appeared to be the entrance to a tunnel but it was too faraway. He wasn't really sure; he thought, "Even if that is the passageway, I don't know what other kinds of vicious creatures might be lurking around in there. If we come across them it might be even more dangerous for us than the situation we are in now. Even so, we can't sit here and wait for death; we're going to die anyway, so we might as well take the risk in trying to find a way out. All I want is for Miss Gongsun to get out of this danger and pass the antidote on to Gu Gu." So he passed the dagger into the hands of Lu'E and said, "I'll go take a look; be careful of the crocodiles." His right foot touched the rock face and he flew away into the pool. Lu'E called out in alarm. Yang Guo's right foot landed on the stomach of the dead crocodile and used it to leap forward; he then landed on the back of a crocodile with his left foot. The crocodile sank into the water while Yang Guo leapt to the other shore; he pressed his body against the rock and searched the surface with his hand. He called out, "There's a large cave over here!"

Gongsun Lu'E's lightness kung fu was not anywhere as good as his; she didn't dare to leap over to the cave like he did. Yang Guo thought that if he went back to carry her on his back, their weight will increase. Not only will their leaping be inconvenienced, they will not be able to use the crocodiles as supports. But since it had come to this he had to risk it and called out, "Miss Gongsun, soak your gown and throw it over to me."

Lu'E did not know what he was going to do but did as she was told; she took off her gown and gave it a quick soak in the pool then hurriedly pulled it back up. She made two knots in the gown, forming a ball; she called out, "Its

coming!" She circulated her internal energy and shot it over.

Yang Guo caught it and untied the gown. He found a place to secure his footing and used his left hand to grab tightly onto a piece of jutting rock. His right hand swung the wet gown and he said, "Listen carefully."

He swung the wet gown forward and waved it about, a 'pai' sound was heard as he struck the mouth of the cave. He struck it three times in a row and asked, "Can you tell where the cave is?"

Lu'E had listened and could tell where it was, she said, "Yes."

Yang Guo said, "Jump forward and grab the gown, I'll pull you over."

Lu'E opened her eyes wide and tried to see but all she saw was darkness; she was really frightened and said, "I... I can't..."

Yang Guo said, "There's no need to be scared. If you miss the gown and fall into the pool, I'll dive in immediately to save you. We were afraid of the crocodiles when we first came here; but now we've got this dagger which can slice metal like butter, what have we got to fear?"

He then sent the gown forward.

Gongsun Lu'E clenched her teeth and pushed out with her feet against the rock face; her body flew up into the air and she heard the noise from the flapping gown and stretched out her hands towards it. Her right hand grabbed the lower half of the gown but her left hand grabbed thin air. As soon as Yang Guo felt his arm go heavy, he immediately swung the gown towards the cave. He was afraid that she would

slip so he quickly leapt over to her and lightly grabbed her waist, holding her steadily by the cave entrance.

Gongsun Lu'E was delighted and called out; "Brother Yang that was a great idea."

Yang Guo laughed, "We don't know what kind of vicious beasts are hiding in this passageway; we'll just let fate decide." He then bent his body and went into the cave.

Lu'E handed the dagger to Yang Guo and said, "You take it." Yang Guo gave her the gown and she covered her body with it.

The cave was extremely narrow; the two of them could only go through it on their hands and knees. The dampness from the crocodile pool caused the cave floor to be damp and slippery and the stench was extremely unpleasant.

Yang Guo crawled along and laughed, "This morning we were enjoying the beauty of the Passion Flowers; flowers were everywhere, birds were singing and we were surrounded by fragrant scents. After just a few hours the scenery has changed to this; I really have caused you great trouble."

Lu'E said, "How can it be blamed on you?"

After crawling along for a while, the passageway gradually became higher and they were able to walk along it. They walked for a very long time but still they did not reach the end. The ground became flatter and flatter.

Yang Guo laughed, "Looks like our bitter experience is turning to joy; we're slowly reaching safety."

Lu'E sighed and said, "Brother Yang, I know you're not feeling in the best of spirits, but you don't have to try to

cheer me up..." Before she finished her words, there was a sudden laugh from the left up ahead, "Ha-ha, ha-ha, ha-ha!"

What they heard just now was definitely laughter but it sounded sad; within the 'ha-ha ha-ha' sound there was mourning and sorrow. Yang Guo and Gongsun Lu'E had never heard a sound like this. It didn't sound like calls or laughter. There was also the fact that they were deep down in a cave in complete darkness and weren't prepared for such a noise. This was much more frightening than coming upon some kind of vicious beast. Though Yang Guo was brave, he couldn't stop himself from jumping; his head bumped into the roof of the cave painfully.

Gongsun Lu'E was so scared that she broke out in a cold sweat with goose bumps all over and hugged his legs.

The two of them didn't know what to do; they didn't dare to advance or retreat.

Lu'E whispered, "Is it a ghost?" She said these words very quietly; but after these words the same voice called out, "Yes, I'm a ghost, I'm a ghost, ha-ha, ha-ha!"

Yang Guo thought, "Since they called themselves a ghost, this person isn't one." So he said loudly, "I am Yang Guo, and along with me is Miss Gongsun. The two of us have run into some danger and we're just trying to find a way to escape it; we have no ill intentions..."

That person interrupted, "Miss Gongsun? What Miss Gongsun?"

Yang Guo said, "The daughter of Valley Master Gongsun, Gongsun Lu'E." No further sound came; it was as if that person had suddenly disappeared without a trace.

When that person was howling out with their cry that wasn't a cry and a laugh that wasn't a laugh, the two of them were extremely frightened. But they were even more frightened after this sudden silence in the darkness; the two of them clung to each other, not daring to make a single move.

After a long time, the person suddenly shouted out, "What Valley Master Gongsun; is it Gongsun Zhi?" The words were filled with anger but they could now clearly tell it was a woman's voice.

Gongsun Lu'E plucked up her courage and said, "My father's name is indeed Zhi, does Old Senior know my father?"

The person chuckled coldly and said, "Do I know him? Haha, do I know him?" Lu'E did not dare to interrupt and just kept silent.

After a while, the person shouted, "What's your name?"

Lu'E said, "Junior's name is Lu'E, the Lu (green) as in red and green, E (calyx) as in the calyx of a flower."

The person gave a heng' grunt and asked, "What is your birth date?"

Lu'E was afraid that this person was asking for her birth date because she wanted to use witchcraft to harm her; she whispered in Yang Guo's ear, "Should I say it?"

Before Yang Guo could reply, the person chuckled and said, "You're eighteen this year, your birthday is on the third day of the second month, and you were born at the 'Xu' hour (7-9 p.m.), correct?"

Gongsun Lu'E was shocked and called out, "You... you... how do you know?" Suddenly she was filled with an

indescribable feeling; she knew that this person would not harm her and she brushed past Yang Guo hurrying forward. After turning two bends, her eyes were suddenly dazzled by the light; before her she saw a half clothed granny sitting on her knees on the floor, her face full of anger and with a great presence.

Lu'E gasped and stood there stunned. Yang Guo was afraid that she was in danger and quickly hurried after her.

He saw that the old granny was sitting a natural grotto; there was a large ten foot wide hole in the roof which allowed sunlight in that came from over a thousand feet above. Most likely she accidentally fell down into the hole and couldn't get out. This grotto was deep underground; even if one called and shouted, a passer by may not hear them. What really was extraordinary was that she was actually still alive after falling from so high. He saw many date trees in the places where the sunlight reached; could it be that she somehow landed on the trees just right, saving her life in the process? He saw that she only had tree bark and leaves to cover herself up with; she must have been trapped in this grotto for years. So long that her clothes have all been worn to shreds.

The granny ignored Yang Guo completely and just looked up and down at Lu'E; suddenly she gave a bleak laugh and said, "Miss, you have grown up beautifully."

Lu'E returned the compliment with a smile and went forward to greet her, "How do you do Old Senior."

The granny faced the sky and laughed with her neither cry nor laughter howl; she said, "Old Senior? Ha-ha, I'm great; I'm great, ha-ha, ha-ha!" After she said this, anger filled her face.

Lu'E did not know how she offended her by saying these respectful words; she was very frightened and looked back at Yang Guo for help.

Yang Guo knew that it would be unavoidable for the granny to lose her mind after being stuck down here for such a long time; he shook his head towards Lu'E and smiled a little, trying to say that there was no need to treat her seriously. He studied the terrain, trying to think of a plan to get out. Though the hole in the roof of the grotto was high, with his lightness kung fu, it might not be an impossible task if he took the risk.

But Lu'E was just concentrating on the granny; she saw that most of her hair had fallen out and was almost completely bald; her face was full of wrinkles but her eyes were still full of vigor. The granny was looking at Lu'E without blinking too; the two of them stared at each other, ignoring Yang Guo.

After looking at her for a while, the granny said, "You've got a red birthmark on your waist on the left side, haven't you?"

Lu'E was shocked and thought, "Even father may not know about my red birthmark; how does this granny know about this? She also knows my birthday and time; it looks like this granny has a deep tie with my family." So she said softly, "Granny, you must know my father and my dead mother, isn't that right?"

The granny was startled and said, "Your dead mother? Haha, of course I know her." Her tone suddenly became stern and shouted, "Have you got a birthmark on your waist? Quickly let me take a look. If you're lying I'm going to kill you right where you're standing."

Lu'E turned her head and looked at Yang Guo, her face blushing. Yang Guo quickly turned away and kept his back

towards her. Lu'E took off her gown and uncovered her white gleaming waist. Indeed there was a red thumb size birthmark on her waist; the red and white contrasted each other, like a red plum in the middle of a field of snow, looking extremely adorable.

The granny just took one look and she trembled all over; her eyes were filled with tears and she opened her arms, calling out, "My precious, mother has been thinking about you bitterly."

Lu'E looked at her expression and suddenly her natural instincts were stirred, she threw herself on her and cried, "Mother, mother!"

Yang Guo was startled when he heard one of them call out 'my precious' and the other call out 'mother'; he turned around and saw the two hugging each other tightly. Lu'E was shaking while the granny was in tears; Yang Guo thought, "Could it be that this granny is actually Miss Gongsun's mother?"

The granny's eyebrows suddenly rose and her face was filled with an air of death, just like Valley Master Gongsun when he fought. Yang Guo silently called out, "No!" He was afraid that the granny would harm Lu'E and dashed forward. But all she did was push Lu'E lightly away on her shoulders and shout, "Stand up, I'm going to question you."

Lu'E was startled; she moved away from her and called out; "Mother!"

The granny said sternly, "Why did Gongsun Zhi send you here? He wanted you to come here to lie to me with your sweet talk, didn't he?"

Lu'E shook her head and said, "Mother, you're actually still alive, mother!" Her face was filled with both joy and

sadness, showing a daughter's love; how can this be faked?

The granny kept on asking sternly, "Gongsun Zhi said I was dead, didn't he?"

Lu'E said, "I have been filled with sadness over the years; I thought that I was a child without a mother. But my mother had actually been alive all this time; I'm really overwhelmed with joy today."

The granny pointed to Yang Guo and said, "Who's he? Why did you bring him here?"

Lu'E said, "Mother, listen to me." She then told her how Yang Guo entered the valley, how he contracted the Passion Flower poison, how the two fell down into the crocodile pool; she told it all from the beginning. But she kept the matter of Valley Master Gongsun marrying Xiao Longnu from her in case her mother would be disturbed by this and break out in a jealous rage.

Whenever Lu'E was unclear on something, the granny would ask her carefully about it. Apart from the matter about Xiao Longnu, Lu'E did not keep anything from her. The more the granny heard, the more peaceful she became; her expression towards Yang Guo was also getting more and more pleasant. When Lu'E described how Yang Guo killed crocodiles and how he protected her, the granny kept on calling out, "Good, good! Little kid, looks like my daughter hasn't picked you without good reason."

Lu'E's face went red and she lowered her head.

Yang Guo knew that it wasn't convenient to explain all the intricacies within all these events right now so he said, "Auntie Gongsun, we first need to come up with an escape plan; how do we get out?"

The granny's face sank and shouted, "What Auntie Gongsun? Don't ever say the words Auntie Gongsun again. Don't think that because I look frail I can't do anything; if I want to kill you it'll be as easy as turning my palm."

A sudden 'bo' sound was heard as something came out of her mouth, a 'zheng' sound was heard as it knocked Yang Guo's dagger to the ground.

Yang Guo felt his arm tremble severely; his five fingers couldn't hold on and the 'dang' sound heard was the dagger striking the floor. Yang Guo leapt backwards in shock; he saw that there was a date stone by the dagger, spinning around on the floor. He was still in shock as he thought, "With the force that I grip the dagger with, even if it was Jinlun Fawang's golden wheel, Da'erba's golden rod or Valley Master Gongsun's jagged saber, they wouldn't be able to knock the dagger out of my hands. Though I wasn't prepared, this granny just spat out a date stone from her mouth to do this; this person's martial arts really are awesome."

Lu'E saw his face change color and she quickly said, "Brother Yang, my mother won't harm you." She went over to him and tugged his hand; she turned to her mother and said, "Mother, tell him how to greet you. He doesn't know yet."

The granny laughed and said, "Fine, this old woman's name will never change; the people of Jianghu call me the 'Iron Palm Lotus Qiu Qianchi'. What should you call me? Ha-ha, shouldn't you be kowtowing to me and calling me 'mother-in-law'?"

Lu'E quickly said, "Mother, don't you know, there's nothing between brother Yang and I, he... he just has good intentions towards me and nothing else."

Qiu Qianchi said angrily, "Nothing else? Nothing between you? Where are your clothes? Why have you only got underwear on? Why are you covered by his gown?" She suddenly pitched her voice up and screamed, "If the one named Yang is thinking about being shameless like that Gongsun Zhi I'm going to make sure that he dies without a *complete corpse. [*Refers to hacking the body apart.] The one named Yang, are you going to marry my daughter?"

Yang Guo saw that she spoke madly and was impervious to reason; how could she force him to marry her daughter after just speaking a few words? But if he bluntly refuses, it would be extremely embarrassing for Lu'E. There's also the fact that this granny's martial arts are extremely high and her character extremely weird; if he said any words that were just slightly displeasing, she would kill him immediately. He saw that the most important thing right now was for the three of them to get out of this place so he said, "Please relax Old Senior; Yang Guo is not a man without a conscience; I will never dare to forget the kindness that Lu'E has shown me." These words were extremely agreeable; though he didn't agree to marry Lu'E, the words pleased the ears of Qiu Qianchi; she nodded, "You'd better not."

Gongsun Lu'E of course knew what Yang Guo meant by this; as she looked at Yang Guo, there was a look of disappointment in her eyes and she lowered her head. A while passed before she said to Qiu Qianchi, "Mother, how did you get down here? Why did father say that you were dead and let me stay saddened for all these years? If I'd known you were here, I would have risked my life to come and find you." She saw that her mother was unclothed; if she let her mother wear Yang Guo's gown then she would be insufficiently dressed; so she tore the back and front of the gown and draped it over her mother's shoulders.

Yang Guo was saddened when he saw what a state the gown that Xiao Longnu had made for him had fallen into; it stirred the Passion Flower's poison and his body broke out with unbearable pain once again.

When Qiu Qianchi saw this, her face moved slightly and her right hand searched for something on her person; but after a thought, her hand came out empty handed.

From her mother's expression and actions, Lu'E had an inkling of her mother's thoughts; she pleaded, "Mother, can you cure the Passion Flower's poison that brother Yang has in him?"

Qiu Qianchi said in a subdued manner, "I have my own troubles being trapped down here; if others can't save me, how can I save others?"

Lu'E said anxiously, "Mother, if you save brother Yang, he will definitely help you. Even if you can't save him, brother Yang will do all he can to help you. Isn't that right brother Yang?"

Yang Guo did not have a good opinion of Qiu Qianchi but he should help her on behalf of Lu'E; so he said, "Of course. Senior has been down here for so long, you must be very familiar with the layout and terrain of this place; can Senior tell me one or two things about it?"

Qiu Qianchi gave a long sigh and said, "Though this place is deep in the ground, it's not that difficult to get out." She looked at Yang Guo and said, "You must be thinking that if it's not hard, how come I'm still down here? Ai... The tendons in my arms and legs were destroyed long ago, and all my martial arts went with it."

Yang Guo had noticed a while ago that there was something different about the movements of her arms and legs. But

Lu'E was shocked when she heard this, she asked, "You did this by falling from up above?"

Qiu Qianchi said gloomily; "No! A person did this to me."

Lu'E was even more shocked by this and quivered, "Mother, who did this to you? We must take revenge against that person."

Qiu Qianchi chuckled, "Revenge? Will you be able to do it? The person who destroyed my tendons is Gongsun Zhi."

Ever since Lu'E found out that she was her mother, she had a feeling that something like this had happened; but when she heard this with her own ears, she trembled all over and asked, "Why... why?"

Qiu Qianchi glanced coldly at Yang Guo and said, "It's because I killed someone, a young beautiful girl; huh, it's because I killed Gongsun Zhi's beloved." When she reached this point, her teeth chattered as she bit down. Lu'E was frightened and moved back a little away from her mother while getting closer to Yang Guo. The grotto became silent.

Qiu Qianchi said suddenly, "Are you hungry? There are only dates for food in this grotto." After she said this, she got on all fours and crawled forward like a wild beast; her movements were very swift. Lu'E and Yang Guo both felt awful when they saw this sight. But Qiu Qianchi had been crawling like this for years and didn't think anything of it. Lu'E was about to dash forward to help her when she saw that she had already reached the base of a large date tree.

Years ago, a date seed must have been blown down into the grotto by the wind and sprouted down here, growing and blossoming and slowly flourishing; and from that one seed, fifty or sixty trees eventually grew. If a date seed had not been blown down here or if it had fallen onto infertile

ground, Yang Guo and Lu'E would have come across upon a pile of bones. Who could think that this pile of bones would be an eminent member of Wulin? And Lu'E would never know that this was actually her mother.

Qiu Qianchi gathered a date stone from the floor and placed it into her mouth; she raised her head and spat out, the date stone shot upwards for tens of feet and struck a branch; the branch swayed and tens of dates rained downwards from the branch.

Yang Guo nodded and thought, "So after her tendons were ruined she managed to learn this great date stone spitting skill. The saying 'heaven never seals off all its exits' isn't a lie." His spirits were roused as he thought about this.

Lu'E picked up the dates from the floor and divided them up for her mother and Yang Guo to eat; she ate a few herself as well. In the middle of this underground grotto, she was serving her mother and acting just like a little hostess.

Qiu Qianchi has endured one of the most tragic experience in anyone's life; hate had been gathered up in her heart over the last ten years. Even if she wasn't a hot tempered person and was a peaceful, kind natured woman, she would still have changed into this unreasonable person. But a mother's love is a natural instinct; when she saw the daughter she had been thinking about night and day had grown into such a beautiful girl, her temper was calmed. The warmth of her love towards her daughter was gradually stirred and she asked, "What has Gongsun Zhi been saying about me?"

Lu'E said, "Father has never talked about mother. When I was little I asked if I looked like my mother. What illness did mother die of? Father would suddenly break out in a temper and scold me for a while, telling me not to bring this

up ever again. A few years later I asked him again and once again, he shouted at me.”

Qiu Qianchi said, “What were you thinking?”

Tears formed in Lu'E's eyes and she said, “I thought that my mother must have been a beautiful, gentle woman and father loved you deeply. Whenever other people mentioned you he would be extremely upset and sad; from then on I didn't dare to ask him about you again.”

Qiu Qianchi chuckled and said, “You must be extremely disappointed; your mother isn't a beautiful and gentle woman but a vicious, cruel and ugly old hag. If you knew about this, I think you would rather not see me.”

Lu'E stretched out her arms to hug her around the neck and said tenderly, “Mother, you're how I imagined you would be.” She turned to Yang Guo and asked, “Brother Yang, my mother is beautiful, isn't she? She treats me well and she treats you well, right?” Her words were filled with sincerity; in her heart, she looked upon her mother as the greatest woman in the world.

Yang Guo thought, “She might have been beautiful when she was younger but how can you say that she's beautiful now? You're right when you said that she treats you well but she might not have any good intentions in her heart towards me.” But since Lu'E asked like this, he could only reply, “Yes, you're right.” His tone was not anywhere near as sincere as Lu'E's; Qiu Qianchi knew it straight away when she heard it, she thought, “Heaven has pitied me and has given me the chance to see my daughter again; though she is filled with respect and love for me now, it would be difficult to ensure that it will be like this forever. I need to tell her about all the bitterness and wrong that I've suffered.” So she said, “E'er, you asked, how did I get here?”

Why Gongsun Zhi said that I'd died? Sit down, I'll tell you all about it."

Qiu Qianchi said slowly, "Gongsun Zhi's ancestors were officials in the Tang court. Later on, because they wanted to avoid the troubles of the court, they decided to reside here in this secluded valley. His ancestors worked as military officials and his family's martial arts can be classed as a respectable skill; but his real advanced martial arts were taught to him by me." Yang Guo and Lu'E both felt rather surprised by this.

Qiu Qianchi said proudly, "You two are still young, of course you wouldn't understand the principles within them. The Iron Palm Clan Chief, the 'Iron Palm Water Floater' Qiu Qianren is my brother. Yang Guo, tell Lu'E about the Iron Palm Clan."

Yang Guo was startled and asked, "The Iron Palm Clan? I'm not very knowledgeable; I really don't know what the Iron Palm Clan is."

Qiu Qianchi scolded him, "Little punk, you dare tell lies in front of me! The Iron Palm Clan is famous throughout the world. Along with the Beggar Clan, we're classed as the world's two greatest clans; how can you not know?"

Yang Guo said, "Junior has heard of the Beggar Clan before but the Iron Palm Clan..."

Qiu Qianchi was exasperated and scolded, "Ha-ha, you've practiced martial arts and you don't even know anything about the Iron Palm Clan..."

Lu'E saw that her mother's face had reddened with anger; she interrupted and tried to persuade her, "Mother, brother Yang is not even twenty yet; he has studied with his Master

deep in the mountains ever since he was young; of course there are things about the Wulin that he doesn't know."

Qiu Qianchi ignored her and kept on grumbling.

Twenty years ago, the Iron Palm Clan was indeed very famous; but at the second Mount Hua competition, the Iron Palm Chief Iron Palm Water Floater Qiu Qianren entered religion and the tutelage of the Reverend Yideng. The Iron Palm Clan dispersed immediately after that. When the Iron Palm Clan was dispersing, Yang Guo had just been born and no one had ever mentioned the clan to him before, so naturally he wouldn't know anything about it. His mother Mu Nianci had actually lost her virtue to his father Yang Kang on Iron Palm Peak; his mother became pregnant and Yang Guo was conceived.

Now as Qiu Qianchi talked about this, his eyes stared, not knowing how to reply. Qiu Qianchi had been in the Passionless Valley for almost thirty years; she has not heard about the changes in the Wulin world. She just knew that the Iron Palm Clan had been famous for hundreds of years, so they must be flourishing even more at the present time. But now she heard that Yang Guo hadn't even heard of the three words 'Iron Palm Clan' before; of course she would break out in a thunderous rage.

Yang Guo was being insulted and cursed at for no reason at all; at first he forced himself to take it; but as it went on, the insults were beginning to go too far. He was starting to get angry and was about to answer back when, just as he was going to open his mouth, he saw Lu'E staring at him. Her eyes were filled with tenderness and her face was looking apologetic. Yang Guo's heart softened and his face showed a helpless expression; he was beginning to feel contented as he thought, "The worse your mother treats me the better you treat me. The old bat's words just brush past the ears,

while the beauty's warmth goes to my heart." His brain became active as his heart relaxed; suddenly he thought, "Miss Wanyan Ping's martial arts appeared to be of the same school as Gongsun Zhi; she also said that she practiced the "Iron Palm"; she must have some kind of connection with the Iron Palm Clan."

He closed his eyes and recalled that when Wanyan Ping fought Yelu Qi, he could remember about seventy or eight percent of it. When he fought Gongsun Zhi just a few hours ago, his attacks and form were even clearer in his mind and he called out, "Ah, I remember."

Qiu Qianchi said, "What?"

Yang Guo said, "Three years ago I saw an extraordinary Wulin Senior battle eighteen men from the world of Jianghu; he fought them all empty handed. In the end he seriously injured nine of them and killed the other nine. I heard this great person say that he was from the Iron Palm Clan."

Qiu Qianchi asked quickly, "What did this person look like?"

Yang Guo made it up as he went along and said, "This person was bald and was around sixty years of age, his face glowed and he was tall, he wore a green gown and said he said his surname was Qiu..."

Qiu Qianchi suddenly shouted, "Bullshit! My two brothers are not bald, they are not tall and they have never worn green before. You saw that I'm tall and bald so you said they're bald as well?"

Yang Guo thought, "Crap!" But his face remained unmoved and he laughed, "There's no need to rush me; I didn't say this person was your brother. Could it be that everyone who's named Qiu is your brother?"

Qiu Qianchi could say nothing after this rebuttal and asked, "What were his martial arts like?"

Yang Guo stood up and performed a few fists of Wanyan Ping's mixed up with the form and palms of Gongsun Zhi; eventually he became more and more fluid in his actions and the grotto was filled with elegant palms and powerful punches. Though his stances were slightly wrong, it was somewhat better than the original palm techniques of Wanyan Ping. His natural movements covered up all the places that were out of form with Wanyan Ping's techniques. His hand and leg movements were tight and complete and whenever he sent out a palm, he would deliberately put extra effort in it to make it more vicious.

Qiu Qianchi watched with great joy, she called out, "E'er, E'er, that's the martial arts of our Iron Clan Palm, watch carefully."

Yang Guo performed these stances with Qiu Qianchi pointing out the stances and explaining the lethal aspects of them from the side.

Yang Guo was amused and thought, "If I carry on any longer she'll see through me." He then stopped and said, "At this point, the Wulin senior had won and there wasn't a need to carry on."

Qiu Qianchi was delighted and said, "You've remembered a lot of the stances wrongly, your hand movements are incorrect as well; but to perform it as you did is really something that is difficult to do. What was the name of this Wulin Senior? What did he say to you?"

Yang Guo said, "This extraordinary person's movements were like a divine dragon. After he won he flew away. I just heard from the remaining nine injured men and they were blaming themselves saying, how could we give trouble to

Master Qiu of the Iron Palm Clan? Weren't we signing our own death warrants?"

Qiu Qianchi said with delight, "That's right, the one named Qiu is most probably a disciple of my brother." Qiu Qianchi loved martial arts; but for the last ten years she hadn't been able to move her arms and legs freely. Now, as she saw Yang Guo perform her clan's martial arts, she was thrilled and was itching to have a go. She then started to lecture the two about her clan's palm techniques and lightness kung fu.

Yang Guo was anxious to get out as quickly as possible so he could deliver the antidote to Xiao Longnu. Though what he heard was advanced and refined martial arts that would benefit him, when he thought about the suffering of Xiao Longnu, how could he keep a frame of mind for learning martial arts? He then signaled to Lu'E with his eyes.

Lu'E understood and said, "Mother, why did you teach father martial arts?"

Qiu Qianchi said angrily, "Call him Gongsun Zhi! Why father this and that?"

Lu'E said, "Yes. Mother, please go on."

Qiu Qianchi said, with hate in her voice; "Huh!" After a while she continued, "This happened twenty years ago. My two brothers got into an argument..."

Lu'E interrupted, "I've got two uncles?"

Qiu Qianchi said, "Don't you know?" Her tone became stern with a hint of scolding.

Lu'E thought, "How would I know?" She replied, "No, no one's ever told me before."

Qiu Qianchi sighed and said, "You... you really don't know anything. Pitiful... pitiful!" After a while she continued, "Your uncles are twins, your older uncle is called Qiu Qianzhang, your second uncle is Qiu Qianren. Their voices, figure and faces were the same, but the two's characters and fate were very different. Second brother's martial arts are extremely high but first brother's martial arts were very ordinary. Second brother taught me martial arts but first brother and I were a lot closer to each other. Second brother was the chief of the Iron Palm Clan; he had many clan matters to deal with and was busy with his own martial arts, so we saw very little of each other. When he taught me martial arts, he was strict and didn't say much to me. But first brother was very close to me; he would say, sister this and sister that. Later on when the two argued, I sided with first brother."

Lu'E said, "Mother, what did the two uncles argued about?"

Qiu Qianchi's face suddenly showed a hint of a smile and said, "This matter is not serious but not too insignificant either; it's just that my second brother was too obstinate. When second brother became the chief of the Iron Palm Clan, his name 'Iron Palm Water Floater Qiu Qianren' was famous throughout the world of the Wulin. Very few knew my elder brother's name. Whenever my elder brother went out, he would sometimes borrow my second brother's name for convenience. The two of them looked the same and were real brothers, so what's so bad about borrowing his name? But second brother didn't see it this way; he would argue about this all the time, saying elder brother was a swindler and trickster. My elder brother had a good temper; whenever second brother scolded him he would just laugh and apologize. One time, second brother went too far. I couldn't do anything and so added a few words to help first

brother. This brought trouble onto me and we argued. I left the Iron Palm Peak in anger and never returned.”

“I roamed Jianghu by myself. One time, I was pursuing a scoundrel and came to the Passionless Valley by accident. This was punishment for the bad deeds in my last life and I met Gongsun Zhi... this evil... this evil scoundrel. We eventually got married. I was older than him by a few years and my martial arts were a lot stronger than his. After we got married not only did I teach him martial arts, I looked after his everyday needs; he didn’t have to do anything in the valley. His family’s martial arts have its ingenious aspects but there were too many holes in them. It was me who thought about it carefully and helped him improve it. One time, a strong enemy attacked; if it wasn’t for me driving them away, this Passionless Valley would have been flattened long ago. Who could have predicted that this scoundrel would repay these deeds with ingratitude? After he grew his wings he forgot about where all his martial arts came from, and who saved him in his time of danger.” She then spurted out a load of insults and curses with the insults becoming eviler as it went on.

Lu’E blushed when she heard this; she felt that insulting her husband like this in front of Yang Guo was a bit embarrassing. She kept on calling out, “Mother, mother!” But how could she stop her? Yang Guo loved it; he hated Gongsun Zhi too and enjoyed these insults immensely. He couldn’t stop himself from adding a few words to stir Qiu Qianchi’s mood further. If it wasn’t for Lu’E, he too would have opened his mouth and insulted him as well.

Qiu Qianchi exhausted her insults until nothing new could be added; she had repeated everything she said and had to stop. She continued, “That year I was pregnant with you and it was unavoidable that my character would become a bit more anxious and worried. Who knew that while it

seemed like he treated me the same on the outside, he was having an affair with a maid behind my back. After you were born, he still carried on with this maid. I didn't know anything; I thought that after we had this beautiful daughter, he would treat me better. I was deceived by them for a few years. One day I accidentally stumbled across them and heard them discussing about leaving the valley together and never returning."

"I was hiding behind a tree and heard that scoundrel say that he was worried about how high my martial arts were and the further they went the better; how I was too controlling and didn't give him any freedom. He said he only felt alive when he was with that bitch maid. I had always thought his feelings for me were real, but when I heard this I was so angry that I almost fainted. I wanted to dash forward and kill the two right there and then. Although he was heartless, I still looked back fondly upon the many years of us being a husband and wife. He was originally a good person, this must be the fault of that seducing bitch using her charms on him. I held my anger and stood behind the tree, listening carefully."

"I heard them say that two days later I'll be meditating for seven days and nights without leaving the room. They would take this chance to leave the valley, and by the time I've found out seven days later, they'll be long gone. I shivered when I heard this; heaven must have pitied me to give me this chance to see through their plans. Otherwise, where on earth would I be able to find them seven days later?" By this point, her teeth were chattering with fury.

Lu'E asked, "What was the young maid called? Was she beautiful?"

Qiu Qianchi said, "Crap! Beautiful my arse! This maid seduced him through her words; whatever the bastard said

she agreed with and she would sweet talk him saying that he was the greatest man on this earth, that he was a great hero. Huh, that bitch was called Rou'er. That Gongsun Zhi with his sinful ancestors, what stance or form of his that I don't know? He's a great hero? He's not even worthy to be a follower of my big brother; if he tried to pour wine for my second brother he would be kicked out on his butt."

By this point, Yang Guo was beginning to feel a little sympathy for Gongsun Zhi, he thought, "It must be because you were too controlling and that your looking down on him was what forced him to finally fight back."

Lu'E was afraid that her mother would break out in another bout of non stop cursing, so she asked quickly, "Mother, what happened then?"

Qiu Qianchi said, "The two animals had decided that in the morning on the third day, they'll meet there again and leave together. They said that in the two upcoming days they'll need to be extremely careful and not leave any clues as to what they were doing in case I found out. The two then continued on with talking rubbish. The bitch looked at the bastard captivated, as if she were looking at someone more important than the Emperor; revering him more than gods and goddesses. That bastard felt proud of himself; he kept on praising himself and then hugged and touched that slut. Their shameless actions almost angered me to death right there and then. Early on the third day, I pretended to meditate in the meditation chamber while Gongsun Zhi came over and peeked in a few times through the window. I waited for him to leave and then utilized my lightness kung fu and rushed to their meeting place. That bitch had arrived there before him. Without saying a word I grabbed her and tossed her into a Passion Flower thicket...." Yang Guo and Lu'E both gasped.

Qiu Qianchi glanced at them and continued, "After a while Gongsun Zhi arrived; there is no need to describe the panicky state he was in when he saw Rou'er rolling about and crying out in pain in the Passion Flowers. I leaped out from behind the tree and held him with my two hands then threw him down into the thicket as well. The valley has an antidote to the Passion Flower poison that had been passed down from generation to generation; it is called the Passionless Pill. Gongsun Zhi struggled and picked himself up; he then helped that slut off the ground and rushed to the pill room, wanting to get the Passionless Pill to cure their poison. Ha-ha, guess what they saw?"

Lu'E said, "Mother, what did they see?"

Yang Guo thought, "You must have destroyed all the Passionless Pills; what else could it be?"

Qiu Qianchi did indeed say, "Ha-ha, when he got to the room, he saw a bowl filled with frosty arsenic water and hundreds of Passionless Pills soaking in the bowl. If he wanted to take the Passionless Pill he would have to take in the poison of the frosty arsenic water; if he didn't take it, he would still die. The method of producing the Passionless Pill is a family secret. It is extremely difficult to get all the precious herbs and medicines to produce them. To make a batch of Passionless Pills requires the spring dew and autumn frost; it will take three years to make. He then rushed to the meditation chamber and begged on his knees for their lives. He knew that I would muse over on our marriage and wouldn't destroy all the pills, keeping some just in case. He struck himself across the face many times; he cried and swore that if I spared the two them he would send Rou'er away and never see her again. And he said he would never dare to do such a thing again."

"As I heard him beg, his mouth kept on talking about Rou'er. I was angry and took out a Passionless Pill and put it on the table. I said, 'There is only one Passionless Pill left. Only one of you can live. You know that it would be of no use if you each take half. You decide whether you want to save her or save yourself.' He immediately took the pill with him and hurried to the pill room. I followed after him. By that time, the bitch was in unbearable pain and was rolling about on the floor.

Gongsun Zhi said, 'Rou'er, go in peace. I'll follow you in death.' He then drew out a sword.

When Rou'er saw how loving he was, she was extremely touched and said, 'Good, good. We'll be a husband and wife in the underworld.' Gongsun Zhi pierced her chest with the sword and killed her.

"I was outside the pill room looking in through the window and was slightly alarmed, I was afraid that the second move will go for his throat. When he raised the sword, I was about to call out to him to stop; but then I saw him wiping the blood away from his sword on Rou'er's body before putting the sword back into its sheath. He turned to the window and said, 'Sister Chi, I'm willing to repent; I've killed that bitch with my own hands, just spare me.'" He lifted his hand towards his mouth and swallowed the Passionless Pill. This wasn't something that I had expected, but since it had ended this way and he was repenting sincerely, I was very pleased. He then planned a feast to apologize to me. I scolded him for awhile and he kept on saying that he deserved to die and he swore hundreds of poisonous oaths, saying that he would never betray me again."

Yang Guo thought, "You're falling into his trap!" However Lu'E was in tears.

Qiu Qianchi said angrily, "What? You pity that bastard?" Lu'E shook her head and didn't say anything. She was actually crying at her father's cruelty and heartlessness.

Qiu Qianchi continued, "I drank two cups of wine and chuckled; I then took out another Passionless Pill from my pockets and placed it on the table. I laughed, 'You might have acted a bit too fast; I was just testing what kind of person you were. If you had begged for just a little while longer I would have given two pills to you. You would have been able to save the life of that little beauty, wouldn't that have been great?'"

Lu'E quickly asked, "Mother, if he actually did beg you for a little while longer, would you have given him two pills?"

Qiu Qianchi thought for a while and said, "I don't know. At that time, the thought of saving that slut passed through my mind. If I saved her and sent her away, then Gongsun Zhi would have been touched by this and might have actually come back to me, not daring to do such things again. But all he cared about was his life and he quickly killed his own lover. That can't be blamed on me."

"Gongsun Zhi picked up the Passionless Pill and looked at it for a long while before he raised his cup and laughed, 'Sister Chi, that's in the past, why bring it up? It's better to kill that girl and tie things up neatly. Let's drink.' I was slightly suspicious when he kept on telling me to drink but I was feeling great and joyful and actually became quite drunk. By the time I woke up, I was already down in this grotto and the tendons in my arms and legs had been destroyed by him. That bastard did not have the guts to see me again. Huh, he must have thought that I'd died long ago."

When she finished talking about this, her eyes suddenly developed a fierce light and her expression was terrifying. Yang Guo and Lu'E both turned away, not daring to look her in the eye. The three of them didn't say a single word for a long, long time.

Lu'E took a look around and all saw that the only things in the cave were rocks, hair and grass; she said somberly, "Mother, have you been relying on these dates only for all these years?"

Qiu Qianchi said, "Yes. Do you think that bastard would send me food?"

Lu'E hugged her and cried, "Mother!"

Yang Guo said, "Has Gongsun Zhi ever mentioned an exit to this grotto?"

Qiu Qianchi chuckled, "He never mentioned that there was such a grotto and pool beneath the manor in all the years we were married. If there was another exit, that bastard would not have put me here. He put those crocodiles in the pool afterwards; he was still afraid that that I would somehow manage to get out."

Yang Guo looked around and saw that indeed there was no other way out apart from the entrance. He lifted his head and looked at the hole in the grotto roof. It was at least a thousand feet off the ground, the tallest tree down there was just forty or fifty feet tall, even if twenty of them were stacked together they would not reach the roof. He thought for a while but couldn't come up with anything. He then said, "I'll take a look from the top of the tree." He then leapt on top of a date tree and saw that there were bumps and grooves higher up the stone walls; it wasn't like down below where it was all smooth and slippery. He then climbed up along the wall and was getting higher and higher; he was

pleased and turned back to Lu'E and called out, "Miss Gongsun, if I can get out I'll let a rope down and get both of you out."

He climbed up about six or seven hundred feet; with his outstanding lightness kung fu, he managed to turn all the dangers he met along the way into minor obstacles. But when he was about seventy or eighty feet away from the entrance, the walls became smooth and slippery without any hand holds and the walls slanted inwards as well. You wouldn't be able to get out unless you were a fly.

Yang Guo took a look around and saw that the opening of the cave was around ten feet wide; more than enough space for someone to pass through. He had a plan and slipped back down to the bottom of the grotto and said, "We can get out! But we'll need a long rope." He then took out the dagger and cut bark off the date trees and tied them into a rope. Gongsun Lu'E was delighted and helped him. Although the two were quick, they had to work for over four hours. The sky was dark before they finished forming an extremely long rope made out of tree bark.

Yang Guo held the rope and tugged it a few times with force; he said, "It won't snap." He then used the dagger to cut off a branch that was around fifteen feet in length and tied one end of the rope to the middle of the branch and wrapped the rope up around it. He then climbed up along the wall again until he neared the top. He then used the "Thousand Kilogram Fall" in his legs to secure his footing and circulated energy into his arms. He shouted out, "Get up!" He threw the tree branch towards the opening of the cave. He used just the right amount of energy and when the branch came back down, it hung across the opening of the cave. Yang Guo pulled the rope to make sure the branch was secure across the opening of the cave. Just two tugs, after which he felt the branch was tight, secure and would

be able to take his weight. He called out, "I'm going up!" He grabbed the rope and climbed up it; he looked down and saw that Lu'E and her mother had become two small black images in the indistinct evening light.

He used more strength in his hands and climbed up even quicker; in a short while he had reached the branch that was hanging across the opening of the cave. He bent his arms and a 'hu' sound was heard as he flew out of the cave and landed on the ground.

He took in a few deep breaths and then stood up. He saw that a bright moon had risen in the east above the mountains. He had been trapped down in the pool and grotto for half a day; now as he gained freedom, he felt an indescribable comfort and thought, "Will I feel no boredom at all if I stay in the tomb with Gu Gu? It is clear that the affect of the surroundings depends on one's feelings; if one wants to get out but can't they'll feel troubled in their hearts; but for those who don't want to get out, getting out will create misery." He then lowered the rope.

As soon as Qiu Qianchi saw Yang Guo climb out of the cave, she cursed her daughter, "Stupid girl, how can you let him get out by himself? Why would he still be worried about us once he gets out?"

Lu'E said, "Mother, relax, brother Yang is not that sort of person."

Qiu Qianchi said angrily, "All men are the same; what good men are there?" She then turned her head towards her daughter and looked at her carefully, she said, "Stupid girl, you've been taken advantage of by him haven't you?"

Lu'E's face went red and said, "Mother, what are you trying to say, I don't understand."

Qiu Qianchi was even angrier and said, "If you don't understand then why did your face go red? Let me tell you, when it comes to men you cannot give them one single step, you cannot be careless; can't you see what happened to your mother?" Just as she was beginning to carry on non-stop, Lu'E got up and caught the rope. She tied it around tightly around her mother's waist and smiled, "Look, does brother Yang care about us or not?" She then tugged on the rope signaling to Yang Guo that she had tied her mother in place.

Qiu Qianchi gave a 'heng' grunt and said, "Let me tell you, once we get back up you better make sure you hold onto him tightly and don't give him an inch. Zhang fu, zhang fu (zhang fu=husband, zhang= ten feet), within ten feet they are still your husband but once outside of ten feet, they're not your husband anymore, do you understand? Your grandpa named your mother Qianchi, a thousand (qian) feet (chi) is a hundred zhang, ha-ha, what husband is there outside of a thousand feet?"

Lu'E was amused but sad at the same time; she thought, "Mother's thinking really is wishful; he hasn't got a place for me in his heart." Her eyes went red and she turned her head.

Qiu Qianchi was just about to say something when she felt the rope around her waist tighten and her body lifted upwards slowly into the air. Lu'E looked at her mother and although she knew that Yang Guo would immediately lower the rope to rescue her, she was alone in this grotto all by herself for the time being and started to tremble with fear.

Yang Guo pulled Qiu Qianchi out of the cave and untied the rope from her waist. He lowered the rope down for a second time. Only after wrapping the rope around her waist did Lu'E relax a little; she pulled on the rope and felt it

tighten around her waist; her body rose up into the air. She saw that the date trees at the bottom of the cave were getting smaller and smaller, while the stars above her were getting brighter and brighter. Just a few more tens of feet and she would be able to get out of the cave.

Suddenly she heard someone shout out from the opening followed by the rope getting loose and her body fall straight back down. What chance is there of staying alive while dropping hundreds of feet? Lu'E screamed and almost fainted; she felt her body plummeting downwards but could do nothing about it.

Yang Guo was pulling Lu'E up and saw that he was about to bring her out when suddenly he heard footsteps from behind him; someone had actually come to attack him from behind. He was extremely startled by this; he couldn't worry about trying to turn around to fight off the attacker and just pulled the rope as quickly as possible.

He heard the attacker shout; "What are you doing sneaking around here?" The sound of a ferocious wind followed, and an extremely long and heavy weapon was sent out towards his back.

From the sounds of the weapon, Yang Guo knew it was the short man Fan Yiweng; with this danger he could only return his left hand and push the staff away, dispersing the force of this attack. Fan Yiweng couldn't see Yang Guo's face in this darkness but knew that his opponent was highly skilled. He took back his staff and swept the staff out again towards his opponent's waist; he had put all his strength behind this attack and really wanted to break his opponent into two pieces.

Yang Guo was holding up Lu'E along with the fairly weighty long rope with his right hand only, in a little while he would

struggle to keep control. When he saw the staff come towards him again, he again sent out his left palm to disperse the attack. He didn't predict that this attack of Fan Yiweng's was so ferocious, when his left palm met the staff his whole body trembled, his right hand couldn't hold on and the rope slipped with Lu'E plummeting downwards.

From the screams of Lu'E, one could tell that she was at the top of the grotto; Qiu Qianchi and Yang Guo both called out. Yang Guo didn't care about defending himself against the staff and sent his left hand forward as he bent to take the rope. But the force that Lu'E was falling down with was extremely high; the weight of Lu'E and the rope along with their plummeting speed created a force of about a thousand kilos. Yang Guo just held the rope for a little while before the force pulled him forwards headfirst towards the entrance of the cave. Though his martial arts were high, he couldn't make a single move right now.

Qiu Qianchi's martial arts had been lost along with the tendons in her arms and legs; she could only watch anxiously from the side as the rope outside the cave became shorter and shorter. Once the rope reaches its end, Yang Guo and Lu'E would fall tragically to their deaths. The end of the rope flew towards Qiu Qianchi as the rope pulled down quickly with Yang Guo and Lu'E's weight. As it neared its end, Qiu Qianchi had an idea, "You evil bastard, I'm going to take you with us." She made sure of her aim and struck the rope, though there wasn't much force behind the push, she managed to get the direction right and made it wrap around Fan Yiweng's waist tightly a few times.

Fan Yiweng felt the rope around his waist tighten and quickly used the "Thousand Kilogram Fall" to steady himself. But he had both Yang Guo's and Lu'E's weight to contend with along with their plummeting force; it brought him step by step closer towards the cave entrance. Fan

Yiweng saw that just another step forward and he too would fall into the cave. With this shock he quickly held the rope with his left hand and braced himself against the cave with his right hand, he gave a shout as he used the cave for support and actually managed to stop the rope.

At that time, Lu'E was just a few tens of feet off the ground; she really was a hairsbreadth away from death. The most powerful force is the force of a falling object, a little stone falling from such a height would have tremendous force in it, by the time Fan Yiweng had exerted all his strength to oppose the falling force, his hands only had two hundred or so kilos to contend with, this was nothing to him. His right hand held the rope and he moved his left hand towards his waist to untie the rope to let his enemy fall when suddenly he felt a subtle pain on his back, a sharp object was pressed against the 'Spirit Stage' pressure point below his sixth vertebrae; a woman's voice shouted, "Quickly pull them up! Damage to the 'Spirit Stage' will lead to ruin of the veins!"

Fan Yiweng was shocked, these words of "damage to the 'Spirit Stage' will lead to ruin of the veins" were the exact words of warning that his Master had told him when teaching him pressure point sealing martial arts. He didn't dare to go against this person's orders and pulled Yang Guo and Lu'E up with his arms. The falling force he had just opposed was extremely ferocious; right now he felt pressure in his chest and a desire to throw up blood. He knew that he had suffered an internal injury and he shouldn't use any force; but his life was in the hands of his enemy, he could only risk his life and comply. He pulled Yang Guo up very easily and then felt his chest widen, his limbs became limp and he threw up blood violently before falling down onto the ground.

The roped slipped once more as he loosened his hand. Qiu Qianchi called out, "Quickly save her!" Yang Guo did not

need any prompts; he grabbed the rope and eventually pulled Lu'E up. Lu'E had fainted from shock after being dropped down and pulled up so many times. Yang Guo first sealed the 'Hidden Rabbit' and 'Large Bone' pressure points of Fan Yiweng to stop his arms and legs from moving before waking Lu'E up.

Lu'E regained consciousness slowly; when she opened her eyes she did not know where she was; under the moonlight she saw Yang Guo laughing and looking at her. She threw herself into his arms and called out, "Brother Yang, are we dead? Is this the underworld?"

Yang Guo laughed, "Yep, we're both dead."

Lu'E noticed something was wrong with his tone; there was a hint of teasing behind it and she moved backwards to look at his face clearly. She saw her mother looking at her with her expression that was neither a smile nor a scowl; Lu'E was embarrassed and called out, "Mother!" She stood up.

Yang Guo saw that although Qiu Qianchi had lost her martial arts, she was still able to subdue Fan Yiweng and saved his life as a result. He had much respect for her and asked, "How did Senior subdue that shortie?"

Qiu Qianchi gave a faint smile and raised her hand; there was a sharp stone in it. She taught Gongsun Zhi's pressure point sealing techniques and Fan Yiweng was taught by Gongsun Zhi. The same things were passed from Qiu Qianchi down to Fan Yiweng with no difference in the formulae. She had placed the sharp stone on Fan Yiweng's 'Spirit Stage' pressure point and called out the frightening words of "damage to the 'Spirit Stage' will lead to ruin of the veins"; how could Fan Yiweng not get alarmed? But with the strength in Qiu Qianchi's hand and with such a small stone, how could she cause 'ruin of the veins'?

Right now Yang Guo's thoughts were only about the safety of Xiao Longnu. Since Lu'E and Qiu Qianchi are safe and Fan Yiweng subdued, he said, "You two wait here for a while, I need to deliver this Passionless Pill."

Qiu Qianchi was surprised and said, "What Passionless Pill? You've got a Passionless Pill?"

Yang Guo said, "Yes, please take a look to see whether it's the real thing." He then took out the little jar and removed the square shaped pill from it.

Qiu Qianchi took it from him and sniffed it a few times before saying, "This is it, how did it get into your hands? Since you've got the poison why haven't you taken it yet?"

Yang Guo said, "It's a long story, I'll tell Senior all about it once I've delivered the pill." He took the pill back and was about to go on his way.

Lu'E was sad and concerned for him, she said quietly, "Brother Yang, you must avoid my father, don't let him see you."

Qiu Qianchi shouted, "You still call him father! If you ever call him father again then don't call me mother."

Yang Guo said, "I'm delivering this pill to my Gu Gu to cure her poison; Valley Master Gongsun will not stop me."

Lu'E said, "If he tries to do something evil to you again, what then?"

Yang Guo laughed wryly and said, "Then I'll just deal with it one step at a time."

Qiu Qianchi asked, "You're going to see Gongsun Zhi, aren't you?"

Yang Guo said, "Yes."

Qiu Qianchi said, "Fine, I'll go with you; maybe I'll be able to help."

All Yang Guo wanted to do was to deliver the pill to Xiao Longnu; he hadn't even made a plan yet; when he heard these words of Qiu Qianchi, his mind suddenly lit up. "If that scoundrel's wife is there, how can he marry Gu Gu?" In his delight he suddenly thought, "But there is only one Passionless Pill; though I'll be able to save Gu Gu, death is unavoidable for me." He became depressed as he thought about this.

Lu'E watched the sudden changes on his face, from delight then to distress; she then thought about her parents meeting up again and what kind of trouble that would bring. Her heart was in confusion and turmoil.

But Qiu Qianchi was feeling great, she said, "Lu'E, carry me on your back."

Lu'E said, "Mother, you need to wash first and change your clothes." She was really afraid of what would happen when her parents meet up again and was just hoping to delay things as much as possible.

Qiu Qianchi said angrily, "I'm in rags, I'm dirty all over, whose fault is this? Could it be...?" She suddenly thought about the times when her brother Qiu Qianzhang pretended to be her second brother Qiu Qianren; he had frightened countless members of the world of Wulin by doing this. The tendons in her arms and legs had been destroyed so even if she sees Gongsun Zhi, how is she a match for him? How could she take revenge? The only thing she could do is pretend to be her second brother and frighten Gongsun Zhi; she'll then wait for an opportunity to take his life. Luckily he had never seen her second brother

before and he must have thought that she had died in the grotto long ago; he would have no suspicions. Another thought went through her mind, "We've been husband and wife for so many years; how will he not recognize me?"

When Yang Guo saw the troubled expression on her face, he was fairly certain of what she was thinking and said, "Senior is afraid that Gongsun Zhi will recognize you, right? I've got something on me that may help." He took out the human skin mask and put it on her; a terrifying face was now seen instead.

Qiu Qianchi was delighted and took the mask, she said, "Lu'E, we'll first go and hide in the forest behind the manor. Go and get me a coarse grass linen gown and get me a large fan, and don't forget." Lu'E nodded and picked up her mother.

Yang Guo took a look around and saw that they were on the peak of a mountain. There were luxuriant forests everywhere; he could see the stone manor. It was a couple of li away.

Qiu Qianchi sighed and said, "This peak is called the Angry Ghost Peak. Stories about the peak have been passed down from generation to generation in this valley, saying that there are ghosts around here. No one dares to come up here. Who could have thought that my return into this world would be by way of this Angry Ghost Peak?"

Yang Guo shouted at Fan Yiweng, "What are you doing here?"

Fan Yiweng showed no fear and shouted, "Just kill me quickly, stop your babbling."

Yang Guo said, "Valley Master Gongsun sent you here?"

Fan Yiweng said angrily, "Yes, Master ordered me to scout the surroundings in case there were evil scoundrels around; master was right, there are people sneaking around who are up to no good." As he talked, he took a look at Qiu Qianchi; he didn't know who this old granny was and why on earth did Miss Gongsun call her mother. Fan Yiweng was older than the Gongsun couple; when Gongsun Zhi took him as a disciple, Qiu Qianchi had already been trapped down in the grotto. Because of this, he didn't recognize her; but from the words of the three, he knew they were plotting something against his Master.

From his words, Qiu Qianchi could tell that he was extremely loyal to Gongsun Zhi; she was furious and said to Yang Guo, "Quickly kill that short man, don't leave trouble for the future."

Yang Guo turned around to Fan Yiweng and saw that he showed no fear; he respected the fact that he was a good man and wanted to spare him. Right now he needed help from Qiu Qianchi and couldn't disobey her. He said, "Miss Gongsun, take your mother and make your way, I'll follow immediately once I've killed him."

Gongsun Lu'E knew that her senior apprentice brother was a righteous and good man; she couldn't bear to see him die and said, "Brother Yang, my senior apprentice brother is not a bad person..."

Qiu Qianchi shouted angrily, "Go, go! You don't listen to anything I say, what use have I got for a daughter like you?"

Lu'E didn't dare to say anything else and searched for a way down the peak.

Yang Guo went to Fan Yiweng and whispered, "Brother Fan, the pressure points of your arms and legs have been sealed; they will unseal by themselves in twelve hours time. I

haven't got anything against you and I can't kill you." He then utilized his lightness kung fu and chased after Lu'E.

Fan Yiweng had closed his eyes and was waiting for his death; there was no way that he could have predicted that Yang Guo would treat him like this. He was stunned and couldn't say anything; he opened his eyes and watched the three disappear into the darkness.

Yang Guo was anxious to see Xiao Longnu and didn't like the slow pace of Lu'E so he said, "Senior Qiu, I'll carry you for a while."

At first Lu'E was worried about the frosty reception between Yang Guo and her mother; but when she heard that he was willing to carry her, she was delighted and said, "It's your turn to work a little."

Qiu Qianchi said, "I carried this beautiful daughter in my womb for nine months and she became yours with just a word, don't you think that I deserve to be carried by you for a while?"

Yang Guo was startled but felt it was inappropriate to reply; he put her on his back and stirred his chi, then shot down the mountain like an arrow from a bow.

Qiu Qianren was named the 'Iron Palm Water Floater'; his lightness kung fu could be as considered as the best in Wulin. Years ago when he was chased by Zhou Botong for ten thousands of miles, he went from the central plains straight to Xuyu. Even with Zhou Botong's great martial arts he wasn't able to catch up with Qiu Qianren. Qiu Qianchi's martial arts were taught to her personally by her brother; before her martial arts were lost, her lightness kung fu was first class. Now, as she was being carried by Yang Guo, she felt him move as if his feet weren't touching the ground and he was flying along. He was running fast

and steadily; she gave him much respect and was surprised, "This little kid's lightness kung fu is completely different to my clan's but it is definitely not below that of the Iron Clan's martial arts; I cannot look down on him." She had felt that her daughter was losing out in not marrying this kid; but her daughter had decided there was nothing she could do. Right now she was beginning to feel that this future son in law was deserving of her daughter.

In a short while Yang Guo reached the bottom of the peak. He turned around to look for Lu'E and saw that she was still somewhere around the middle. After a long while she reached the bottom of the mountain; by that time she was breathing heavily and her forehead was covered with sweat.

The three of them made their way quietly to the back of the manor. Lu'E did not dare to go into the manor and went to a neighboring building to borrow clothes for herself and the gown and fan that her mother wanted. She also borrowed a gown for Yang Guo. Qiu Qianchi wore the human skin mask and put on the gown; her hand held the fan and she let Yang Guo and Lu'E support her as they made their way into the manor.

As they made their way, the three of them were filled with thoughts. Qiu Qianchi had not been back here for over ten years; as she returned to old grounds, she felt a great release. But then she saw that grand red lanterns were hung at the door of the manor; she took a closer look and saw that the doors were decorated for a celebration; drums and music could also be heard from inside the hall.

All the servants were startled when they saw Qiu Qianchi and Yang Guo; but when they saw Lu'E with them, they didn't dare to say anything.

The three went straight into the hall and saw that it was filled with guests; most of them were the neighbors of the Narcissus Manor of the Passionless Valley. Gongsun Zhi was dressed in a groom's outfit and stood on the left. The bride was standing on the right wearing a Phoenix Hat and red veil; though her face was covered, one could see that she had a fine figure; this was Xiao Longnu.

The firelight in the courtyard flickered. Three loud noises were heard. The person leading the procession sang, "The time has come, the newlyweds bow to the heaven and earth!"

Qiu Qianchi laughed; it made the candlelight flicker and tiles of the house tremble. She said clearly, "If the newlyweds bow to the heaven and earth, what about the wed of old?"

Though the tendons in her arms and legs were snapped, her internal energy was not affected. She had nothing to do in the grotto and practiced bitterly night and day. Her ten years of cultivation was superior to those who've cultivated for twenty years. As these words were shouted out, the ears of all the people in the room rang. The room darkened as ten or so candles went out.

Everyone was shocked and all turned their heads. Gongsun Zhi was already shocked when he heard the shout; but when he saw Yang Guo and his daughter safe and sound beside this concealed guest, he was even more startled; he shouted, "Who's this guest?"

Qiu Qianchi tightened her throat and chuckled, "You and I have a close relationship; are you pretending that you don't know me?" When she spoke these words she had submerged her chi into her 'dan tian'; though she didn't speak loudly, the words reverberated far and wide.

Mountains surrounded the Passionless Valley and after a while the echoes came back with repetitions of “You don’t know me? You don’t know me?”

Jinlun Fawang, Yin Kexi and Xiaoxiang Zi and the others were watching the procession from the side; when they heard Qiu Qianchi’s voice, they knew that an eminent person had arrived and everyone looked at each other.

Gongsun Zhi saw this person was wearing a coarse grass linen gown and was holding a fan; the description of his brother in law Qiu Qianren from his wife matched this person and this person’s internal energy was amazing. But the face looked odd; it looked like the face of Zhou Botong when he was disguising himself as Xiaoxiang Zi. There must be something awry here. He prepared himself and said coldly, “I have never met this guest before so isn’t this close relationship a joke?”

Yin Kexi was versed in Wulin affairs; when he saw Qiu Qianchi’s coarse grass linen gown and fan, his mind lit up and asked, “Could it be that Iron Palm Water Floater Qiu Qianren senior Qiu Lao is here?”

Qiu Qianchi laughed and fluttered her fan a few times before saying, “And I thought that all the people who knew this old and useless man had all died long ago; so there’s one remaining.”

Gongsun Zhi was unmoved and said, “Are you really Qiu Qianren? I’m afraid that it’s just some lying scoundrel.”

Qiu Qianchi was shocked and thought, “This bastard is clever; how does he know that I’m not my brother?” She couldn’t see how he saw through her and just chuckled, not replying.

Yang Guo ignored the games of the couple and dashed over to Xiao Longnu. He held the Passionless Pill in his right hand and lifted the veil across her face with his left hand, he said, "Gu Gu, open your mouth."

Xiao Longnu's heart skipped a beat when she saw Yang Guo again; her shock and delight amassed together at once and she said, "You... you are indeed better." She knew that Gongsun Zhi was an evil and cruel man; she only agreed to marry him because she wanted to save Yang Guo's life. When Yang Guo suddenly appeared in front of her again, she thought that Gongsun Zhi had kept to his word and cured his poison.

Yang Guo placed the pill in her hand and said, "Quickly swallow!"

Xiao Longnu did not know what it was but did as she was told. After a short while, she felt a cool air penetrating through her 'dan tian'.

The hall broke out in chaos; when Gongsun Zhi saw that Yang Guo had come here again to cause trouble, he wanted to go up and stop him; but he was worried about the concealed strange guest. He didn't know whether or not that person really was his brother-in-law Iron Palm Water Floater Qiu Qianren and didn't dare make a move for the time being.

Yang Guo tore off Xiao Longnu's Phoenix Hat and red veil; then pulled her to the side and said, "Gu Gu; that scoundrel Valley Master is going to suffer, let's watch."

Xiao Longnu was confused and just leaned on Yang Guo; she didn't know what to say.

Ma Guangzuo felt unspeakable delight when he saw Yang Guo suddenly appearing here again. He went to him and

kept on asking questions; the thought of him disturbing the two never entered his mind. Yin Kexi had heard that twenty years ago, Qiu Qianren shook the world of Wulin and was extremely famous. Now he heard the laugh and shout which echoed throughout the valley; his internal energy was extremely high and he wanted to meet him. He stepped forward and bowed, saying "Today is Valley Master Gongsun's day of celebration; has Senior Qiu Lao come for the celebrations as well?"

Qiu Qianchi pointed to Gongsun Zhi and said, "Do you know who that person is to me?"

Yin Kexi said, "I don't know, but I would like to know."

Qiu Qianchi said, "You need to ask him yourself."

Gongsun Zhi asked again, "Are you really the Iron Palm Water Floater? That's strange!" He clapped his hands and said to a disciple in green, "Go to the library and bring the box from the shelf on the eastern side to me."

Lu'E did not know what to do and just pulled a chair over for her mother to sit down in.

Gongsun Zhi was surprised, "How come she and that Yang scum are still alive after falling into the crocodile pool?"

In a short while, the disciple returned with the box and handed it over to Gongsun Zhi. Gongsun Zhi opened it and took out a letter. He said frostily, "Years ago, I received a letter from Qiu Qianren. If you really are Qiu Qianren then this letter is a fake."

Qiu Qianchi was shocked and thought, "Ever since brother and I argued, we've never contacted each other; why did he send a letter to me all of a sudden? What's in the letter?"

She then said loudly, "When did I write a letter to you? That really is a load of bull."

When Gongsun Zhi heard her accent, he suddenly remembered someone. He was shocked and his back broke out in a cold sweat; but he immediately thought, "It can't be, it can't be; she died long ago in that grotto, she's just a pile of bones now. But who exactly is this person?" He opened the letter and read it out loud: "To Brother Zhi and Sister Chi: Ever since first brother died at the hands of Guo Jing and Huang Rong on Iron Palm Peak..."

When Qiu Qianchi heard this line she was filled with hurt and sorrow; she shouted, "What? Who said my brother is dead?" The sibling love between she and Qiu Qianzhang was extremely deep; when she heard news of his death her whole body shook and her voice changed. Originally she had submerged her chi into her 'dan tian' and it was difficult to distinguish whether her voice was a male's or female. Now, as her feelings were brought out, the words 'who said my brother is dead' were said with a female voice.

Gongsun Zhi heard that the person in front of him had a female voice and said 'my brother', he was shocked even further; but now he was certain that this person in front of him is definitely not Qiu Qianren, he continued reading:

"...this stupid brother had been extremely shameful in not holding our sibling relationship together and creating this hostility between us; all the blame is on this stupid brother. I pondered in the middle of the night and realized all the countless evil deeds I have done. At the second Mount Hua tournament, Reverend Yideng enlightened this stupid brother; I dropped my knife of slaughter and followed the ways of Buddha. I have just begun my studies; apart from Buddha's teachings my mind is always on the joyous days of the past with brother and sister. I wish to make up for the

things I've done before it's too late. Fate is a hard thing to judge.

From monk Ci'en."

Qiu Qianchi had been sobbing during all this; by the time Gongsun Zhi finished reading the letter she could hold it in no longer and cried out, "Big brother, second brother, you need to know the suffering I've been through." She took off the mask and shouted, "Gongsun Zhi, do you remember me?" This sentence was shouted out sternly, another seven or eight candles in the hall blew out while the ones that stayed alight flickered.

In the gloomy candlelight, an old woman with a long face and wretched expression could be seen; everyone trembled in fear and no one dared to say anything. The hall was silent and everyone's heart was pounding.

Suddenly, an old servant who was standing in the corner threw himself forward and called out, "Matron, Matron, you're not dead."

Qiu Qianchi nodded and said, "Second Uncle Zhang, you remember me."

This old servant was extremely loyal; when he saw his Matron alive and well, he was delighted and kept on kowtowing, calling out, "Matron, this really is something to rejoice."

Apart from Jinlun Fawang and the others, all the guests were residents of the valley; most of the people over thirty or forty years of age could remember who she was and they all rushed forward with their questions.

Gongsun Zhi shouted loudly, "Stand back!"

The crowd was alarmed and moved back. They saw him pointing to Qiu Qianchi, shouting out, "Witch, why have you returned? You've actually still got the face to see me?"

Lu'E had been hoping that her father would admit his mistakes and get back together with her mother. But when her father came out with this, she became emotional and rushed to her father; she knelt down on the floor and called out, "Father! Mother's not dead, mother's not dead. Quickly apologize and ask for her forgiveness."

Gongsun Zhi chuckled, "Ask her for forgiveness? What have I done wrong?"

Lu'E said, "You trapped mother down that grotto and let her stay down there to suffer for over ten years. Father, how could you do that to her?"

Gongsun Zhi chuckled, "It was she who first harmed me; do you know that? She pushed me in the flower thicket and let me endure the suffering of the piercing of thousands and thousands of thorns; do you know that? She placed the antidote in frosty arsenic water, putting me in a situation where if I took it I'd die, if I didn't I'll still die; do you know that? She even forced me to... to kill my lover; do you know that?"

Lu'E cried, "I know that, it was Rou'er."

Gongsun Zhi had not heard this name for over ten years; his face changed as he heard it and he faced the sky, mumbling, "Yes, it was Rou'er, it was Rou'er!" He pointed to Qiu Qianchi and said with revulsion, "It was that evil and cruel witch who forced me to kill Rou'er!" His face was becoming more and more mournful; he quietly called out, "Rou'er... Rou'er..."

Yang Guo felt that sinful couples were not good people. He was poisoned himself and had only a few days to live; he just hoped that he could spend these few days with Xiao Longnu in peace. He didn't care about which one of the Gongsun couple was wrong or right; he lightly tugged on Xiao Longnu's sleeve and whispered, "Let's go."

Xiao Longnu said, "Is that woman really his wife? Was she really trapped down in a cave by her husband for over ten years?" She could not believe that such an evil person could exist.

Yang Guo said, "That couple is taking revenge on each other."

Xiao Longnu thought for a while and whispered, "I don't understand this; could it be that she was the same as me and forced into marrying him?" In her thoughts, if two people aren't forced into marriage then they'll be loving and compassionate towards each other; how could they harm each other?

Yang Guo shook his head and said, "There are many bad people in the world, while there's only a few who're good; the thoughts of these people are hard to fathom..."

Suddenly Gongsun Zhi shouted, "Move!" His right leg lifted up and Lu'E's body flew away; she had been kicked by her father.

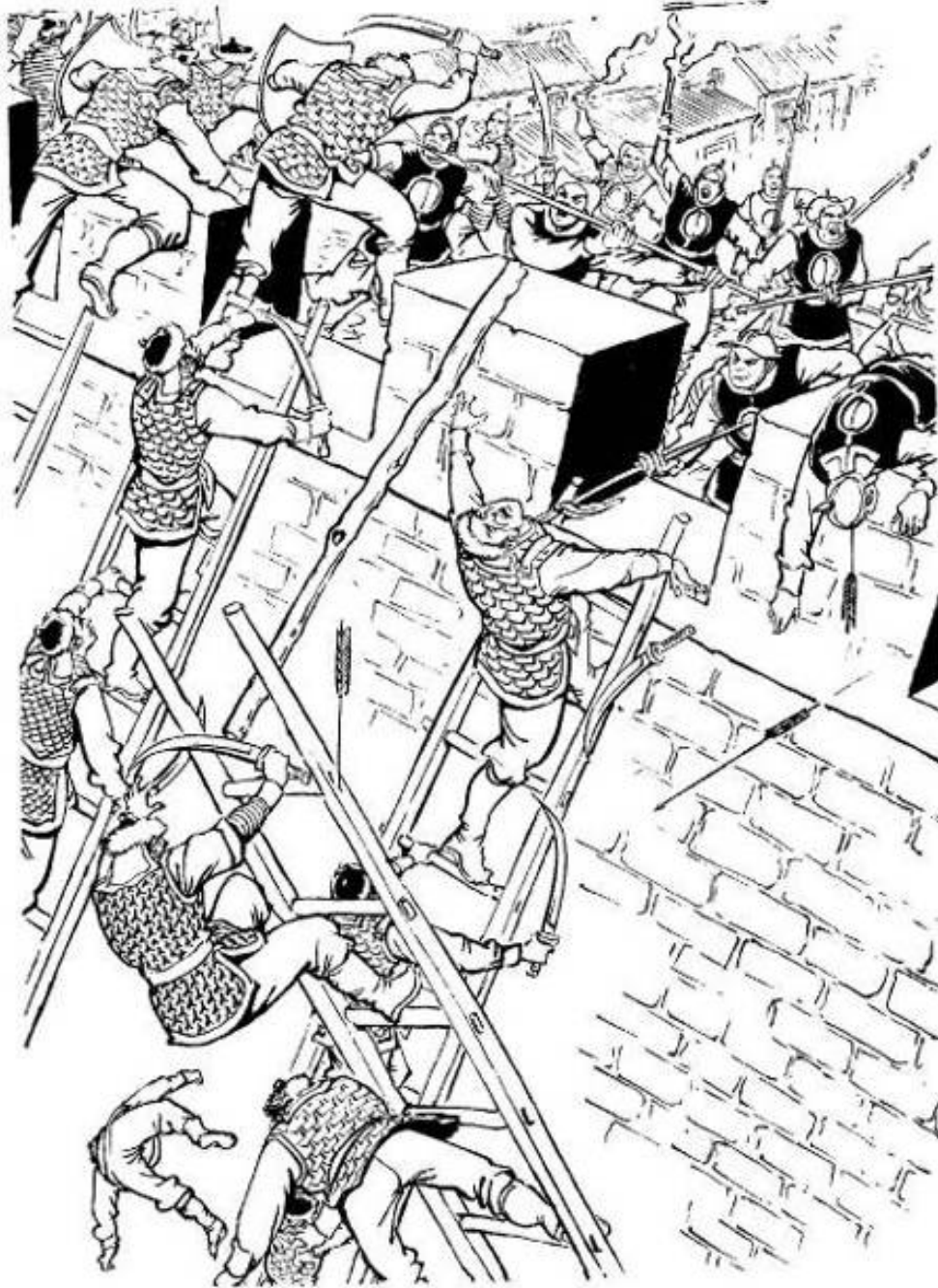
Her body was flying straight towards Qiu Qianchi's upper body. Qiu Qianchi could not move her arms and legs; she could only lower her head to avoid her. But Lu'E was coming in too fast; a 'peng' sound was heard as she crashed into the shoulders of her mother. Qiu Qianchi fell backwards with the chair, her bald head crashing into the stone pillar behind her. Blood stained the stone pillar and she couldn't

crawl back up. After being kicked by her father, Lu'E was on the floor as well, lying unconscious.

End of Chapter 19.

Chapter 20 - A Hero's Imperative

Translated by Noodles



The Mongolians attacked Xiang Yang once again. Arrows and stones were sent towards the city like rain and hail. The soldiers at the front of the

attack placed ladders around the city of Xiang Yang and climbed up. The city was guarded tightly; groups of eight soldiers held a wooden ram in the arms and were knocking the ladders off the city walls.

Yang Guo wanted to keep himself away from this dispute but when he saw how cruel Gongsun Zhi was, his anger erupted and he decided to step forward to argue with him. Just as he was about to do this, Xiao Longnu dashed forward and picked up Qiu Qianchi. She patted her 'Jade Pillow' pressure point a few times and controlled the bleeding. She then tore off a piece of cloth from her sleeve and covered her wound before shouting at Gongsun Zhi, "Mr. Gongsun, she is your wife, how can you treat her like that? Since you've already got a wife, why do you still want to marry me? Even if I married you, won't you treat me just as you've treated her?"

Those three sentences were asked fervently; Gongsun Zhi's tongue was tied and he couldn't reply. Ma Guangzuo couldn't help himself and cheered.

Xiaoxiang Zi said coldly, "This Miss is right."

Gongsun Zhi really did love Xiao Longnu; though he was made speechless by her he didn't get angry, he was just embarrassed; he lowered his tone and said to her, "Sister Liu, how can you compare yourself with that evil woman? I can't love you enough; if I have any ill intent towards you then let heaven condemn me where I stand."

Xiao Longnu said coldly, "All I need is him to love me; even if your love for me is a hundred times stronger I wouldn't care." She then went over to Yang Guo and held his hand.

Yang Guo was filled with resentment, he thought, "Gu Gu loves me like this yet I just have a few days to live and it's all because of this bastard." He pointed to Gongsun Zhi and shouted, "You said you have no ill intent towards my Gu Gu, huh! You left me for dead and then lied to my Gu Gu to get her to marry you; is that good intent? She's been poisoned by the Passion Flowers and you know that there isn't an antidote to cure her, yet you don't tell her, is that good intent?"

Xiao Longnu was shocked and quivered, "Is this true?"

Yang Guo said, "Don't worry; you've already taken the antidote." He then smiled a smile that was filled with grief along with joy, he thought, "I've given the antidote to you; I'm willing to die for you."

Gongsun Zhi looked at Qiu Qianchi and then looked at Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo; his eyes swept across them and jealousy, yearning, anger, shame, embarrassment and disappointment all filled his heart and disturbed him. Although he had great self control, he had now fallen into a semi mad state. He suddenly bent down and took out his yin yang twin blades from under their red cover; he clashed them together and shouted, "Fine, fine! We'll all die together!"

Everyone gasped; they would never have thought that he had actually brought weapons to his wedding ceremony.

Xiao Longnu chuckled, "Guo'er, we don't have to be respectful to such an evil person."

A 'qiang lang' sound was heard as she took out a pair of swords from underneath the bridal gown; it was the 'Gentleman' and 'Lady' swords. Though she wasn't versed in the ways of the world, she did not have an ounce of mercy in her when dealing with such evil people. When she

went to take revenge for Grandma Sun, she frightened all the Taoists of Chongyang Palace witless and the Blithe Sage Hao Datong almost lost his life to her. The thought of killing him entered her mind when Gongsun Zhi had stopped her and Yang Guo from getting back together today. She had hidden the weapons beneath her gown so that when Gongsun Zhi cured Yang Guo, she would immediately take the opportunity to attack him with Yang Guo at her side. If it didn't work then she would kill herself for Yang Guo; not allowing herself to be sullied in this Passionless Valley.

All the guests were shocked when they saw that both of them had prepared weapons. Only Fawang and the others, who were experienced, knew that this celebration would end in tragedy and weren't surprised. They were only surprised with the fall of Qiu Qianchi in one attack; this did not match the abilities of someone with the profound internal energy she had just shown.

Yang Guo took the 'Gentleman' sword from Xiao Longnu and said, "Gu Gu, today we'll kill that man to take revenge for me."

Xiao Longnu's 'Lady' sword trembled and she said surprised, "Take revenge for you?"

Yang Guo was filled with sadness in his heart but he couldn't tell her about it, he just said, "This bastard has harmed many people." He flipped his sword and went for Gongsun Zhi's left side. He knew that this battle was extremely dangerous; though Xiao Longnu's Passion Flower poison had been cured, he was still poisoned. If they come together and used the "Pure Heart of Jade Maiden Swordplay" and stirred feelings of love, he would break out with unbearable pain. He kept his eye on the enemy and used "Quanzhen Swordplay"; every stance and form of his was extremely stringent and cautious. If these stances were

performed by Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji and the other old Taoists, the stances will of course be performed steadily and controlled, profound and intense. In the hands of Yang Guo it displayed maturity beyond his years but his stances were slightly less smooth.

Gongsun Zhi knew that when the two used their combined swordplay they were powerful so he immediately used the “Yin Yang Wild Blades” with the black sword in his right hand and the gold saber in his left. His stances were getting fiercer and fiercer with every stroke. The “Quanzhen Swordplay” that Yang Guo was using was developed by Wang Chongyang; though it wasn’t vicious and fierce like the opponent’s, it was subtle and had variations. Yang Guo defended cautiously and did not attack as he received three stances. Xiao Longnu called out and raised the ‘Lady’ sword, attacking Gongsun Zhi’s back.

Gongsun Zhi was furious, he thought, “This beautiful girl was going to be my wife and now she’s joined an outsider to attack me.” He continued thinking, “The evil bitch coming back here suddenly and revealing all the things I’ve done has caused me to lose my respect and all face. Not only can’t I force sister Liu to marry me; it looks I won’t be able to keep my position here in the valley.” Though today’s matters are troublesome, he was going to rely on his martial arts to get him out of this mess. All he wanted to do was beat Yang Guo, kidnap Xiao Longnu and run away. He didn’t know that Xiao Longnu’s Passion Flower poison had been cured and still thought that she had less than thirty six days to live; he was still going to force her to marry him. His thoughts were becoming more and more evil and the wild twin blades in his hands were becoming more vicious by the minute.

Xiao Longnu used the “Jade Maiden Swordplay” so that when Yang Guo and she become one, they would be able to

unleash the power of the “Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden Swordplay”. But his eyes did not glance over at her once; he was just concentrating on himself as he fought.

Xiao Longnu was extremely surprised and asked, “Guo’er, why aren’t you looking at me?” Her love was gradually being stirred and the light from her sword suddenly enhanced.

When Yang Guo heard her voice, his heart trembled and his chest broke out with an unbearable pain. His sword slowed and a ‘chi’ sound was heard as the black sword cut his sleeve. Xiao Longnu was alarmed and unleashed three stances in a row, blocking Gongsun Zhi’s attack.

Yang Guo said, “I can’t look at you or listen to you.”

Xiao Longnu said tenderly, “Why?”

Yang Guo was afraid that he would meet danger again and replied coarsely, “If you want me to die then continue talking to me!” As soon as his anger stirred the pain immediately stopped and he received the stances of Gongsun Zhi’s black sword.

Xiao Longnu was extremely sorry and said, “Don’t be angry, I won’t say anything more.” Her mind suddenly lit up, “My poison has been cured but his hasn’t! He got the antidote but he didn’t take it and returned here to give it to me.” She was extremely touched and the love in her was boundless; as soon as this feeling grew, the power of the “Pure Heart of Jade Maiden Swordplay” enhanced greatly. The stances that she unleashed protected all of Yang Guo’s vital points. Since she was protecting Yang Guo, Yang Guo should protect her, but he didn’t dare to glance over at her; and so she was completely unprotected and exposed to the enemy’s attack.

Gongsun Zhi's eyes were very sharp; he discovered the weakness in just a few stances but he didn't want to harm a single hair of Xiao Longnu's head. He directed all his vicious sword and saber stances towards Yang Guo. He was attacking like a crashing wave but Yang Guo was defending like an unmovable cliff. With Xiao Longnu using all her efforts to protect him, all of Gongsun Zhi's attacks were actually rendered useless.

By this time, Lu'E had wakened up and stood next to her mother watching the battle. She watched as Xiao Longnu concentrated only on guarding Yang Guo, ignoring all dangers to herself; she couldn't help but ask herself, "If that was you, could you disregard all the dangers to yourself to protect him?" She sighed lightly and said, "I would definitely be able to act like Miss Long, but he would not act the same way towards me."

Just at this time, Qiu Qianchi hissed, "The false saber is not a saber; the false sword is not a sword!"

Both Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were startled when they heard this, they didn't know what she meant by these two sentences."

Qiu Qianchi called out, "The saber is a saber, the sword is a sword!"

Yang Guo had fought Gongsun Zhi twice; all along he has been pondering about where the essence of the "Yin Yang Wild Blades" lies but the light, airy black sword chopped solidly while the heavy gold saber was swift and flighty, following the way of the sword. The stances he was using were the complete opposite to the orthodox martial arts theories. It would be fine if the saber was using sword techniques only and the sword was using saber techniques only; but the reality was, that in the midst of the sword

techniques there were saber stances; buried within the saber stances were the lethality of sword strokes. The variation was mysterious and difficult to grasp; when he heard those words of Qiu Qianchi he thought, "Could it be that the sword techniques of the saber and the saber techniques of the sword are all illusions?" He saw the black sword chopping across his shoulders; this was definitely a saber stance. He then treated it as a sword and extended his 'Gentleman' sword forward; the swords collided and they both took a step back. Only then did he know that the black sword was still just a sword, and the saber stances that he was using were merely trying to confuse his opponent. But if the opponent's martial arts were slightly poor, the saber techniques would still be able to cause harm.

With this immediate success, Yang Guo was delighted and continued to search for weaknesses in the opponent's sword and saber. He was thinking that although the jumbled stances were masterly, the ways of these blades would not be refined. A few more stances passed when he heard Qiu Qianchi say, "Attack his right leg; attack his right leg."

Yang Guo saw that Gongsun Zhi's saber was like a blur; there was no open space to attack on his lower body at all. But he thought that, although Qiu Qianchi was not able to perform martial arts anymore, her knowledge was still there. She was the one who taught Gongsun Zhi martial arts; she would definitely know what was real and what was false; so he listened to her and attacked his right leg. Gongsun Zhi swept his saber across and there was no way to hit his right leg; but as he did this, his left shoulder and left side were left unprotected. Yang Guo did not wait for Qiu Qianchi to prompt him and flashed his sword towards him, cutting through his gown underneath his armpit.

Gongsun Zhi cursed and leapt back; he stared angrily at Qiu Qianchi and shouted, "Old witch; do you think I'm going to let you go?" He then continued to attack Yang Guo with the saber and sword.

Yang Guo raised his sword to block the attack. Qiu Qianchi continued, "Kick his back!"

The two of them were facing each other, there was no way he could kick his back; but Yang Guo was confident in Qiu Qianchi. He knew that there was a deeper meaning behind her words; he didn't care what would happen and dashed towards the back of his opponent. Gongsun Zhi used his saber to cut backwards.

Qiu Qianchi called out, "Pierce his forehead."

Yang Guo thought, "I've just turned towards his back and now you're telling me to pierce his forehead?" It was an urgent situation and he didn't give it much thought, he turned back towards the enemy's front and he was just about to pierce his enemy's forehead when Qiu Qianchi called out, "Cut his arse!"

Lu'E watched with sweaty palms; she knitted her eyebrows and thought, "By calling madly like this, isn't mother helping father instead?" She kept her thoughts to herself but Ma Guangzuo couldn't contain himself and he shouted out, "Brother Yang, don't fall into the trap of that old woman; she wants to kill you."

Yang Guo had twisted and turned many times and had an inkling as to what her meaning was; when she called out go forward he turned forward and when she shouted go backward he immediately dashed behind him. Indeed, after a few twists and turns, Gongsun Zhi's right side was uncovered. Yang Guo sent his sword towards Gongsun Zhi's right side and a 'chi' sound was heard as it the sword cut

through his gown, piercing about an inch into Gongsun Zhi's side; blood immediately flowed down his side.

The crowd gave an 'ah' call and stood up. Fawang and the others now understood. Qiu Qianchi was not instructing Yang Guo on how to gain victory; she was instructing him on how to gain an opportunity to win in a situation where it was impossible to gain victory. She was not pointing out the weakness of Gongsun Zhi, but was trying to make Yang Guo force a flaw in the opponent from his flawless stances. After being prompted by Qiu Qianchi a few times, Yang Guo immediately understood this advanced martial art notion; he was in awe of her and thought, "If the opponent is a skilled fighter, what flaws will they show in their stances? This piece of advice from this senior is more than enough for a lifetime's use."

But to force a flaw in Gongsun Zhi required not only for one's martial arts to be higher than his, but one must also be familiar with his stances. A person must be clear on all his variations and reactions over ten stances beforehand, before luring him step by step into making an error. Only Qiu Qianchi was able to do this. Yang Guo understood but he was not able to realize it. He heard her prompt and the sword suddenly flashed out, attacking Gongsun Zhi's back, front and sides urgently. Over twenty stances later, Gongsun Zhi's leg was cut.

Though this cut wasn't deep, it was long, at least five or six inches long. Gongsun Zhi thought, "The two of them are guarding each other, I can't hurt the one named Yang; if this continues, with the old hag giving advice, I'll die by this bastard's sword." Years ago, in order to save his own life he killed his lover; in this desperate situation he couldn't care about Xiao Longnu anymore. He moved his black sword and swiped his saber, slashing towards Xiao Longnu's shoulders.

Yang Guo was alarmed, he stretched his sword forward to protect her from this attack when he heard Qiu Qianchi call out, "Stab his waist." Yang Guo was startled and thought, "Gu Gu is being attacked right now, how can I not save her? But each time Senior Qiu Lao has given me advice, it has a deeper meaning behind it. It looks like this is a 'surrounding Wei to rescue Zhao' plan." He changed his mind and the sword arrived at Gongsun Zhi's waist. Suddenly Xiao Longnu called out, her right arm was cut and the 'Lady' sword fell onto the floor. Gongsun Zhi's black sword slanted across and blocked Yang Guo's sword.

Yang Guo was extremely shocked and quickly called out, "Move back, I'll take him by myself." His love and care for her was stirred and his chest broke out in an aching pain again. Xiao Longnu's injury was not slight; she moved backwards and tore off a piece of her sleeve, wrapping it around her wound. Yang Guo fought with his life; he was furious with Qiu Qianchi and glanced at her with rage.

Qiu Qianchi chuckled, "Why are you blaming me? I'm just helping you defeat your enemy; who's trying to help you to rescue someone? Ha-ha, what's her life got to do with me? It's better if she dies!"

Yang Guo said angrily, "You and your husband are a perfect match; there isn't an ounce of goodness in either of your hearts!"

Qiu Qianchi just chuckled; she didn't get angry and remained composed as she concentrated on the battle.

Yang Guo glanced over at Xiao Longnu and saw her leaning on a chair with her wound wrapped up. It looked like it wasn't serious and his spirits were roused. His sword techniques suddenly changed from "Quanzhen Swordplay" to "Jade Maiden Swordplay". Gongsun Zhi saw his sword

stances had been steady and cautious; but suddenly they were now supple and lively, graceful and attractive. It was as if Yang Guo had changed into another person. Gongsun Zhi was surprised and thought, "This person is extremely crafty, what is he trying now?" After taking a few stances, he felt that his opponent's swordplay had the same elegant and lofty air of a distinguished family; the same type of swordplay that Xiao Longnu had used. All Gongsun Zhi's doubts were erased and he attacked with both his sword and saber.

Ten or so stances later, Yang Guo was gradually being put on the back foot (a sign of coming defeat) and forced to retreat. Qiu Qianchi gave advice to Yang Guo repeatedly but he was furious with her for deliberately intending to get Xiao Longnu injured. He ignored her and said to himself, "Who needs your annoying words?" He unleashed four strokes and hummed, "The minutiae of a fine horse, a radiant and beautiful coat, the left grabs the many weak, the right receives the forgotten retreat." The verses matched the sword stances and he performed the sword strokes with great elegance.

Gongsun Zhi was startled and said, "What?"

Yang Guo continued, "The galloping wind and the flashing lightning, the chasing image flying away. Swift and powerful from the central plains, appearance is the aim." The stances were grouped in fours, reflecting the verse. Where it said, 'the galloping wind and the flashing lightning, the chasing image flying away', the sword stances were extremely quick; when it said, 'swift and powerful from the central plains, appearance is the aim', the sword strokes were swift and vicious yet also carried elegance along with it.

Gongsun Zhi had never seen these sword stances before. The verses were pleasing to the ear and he slowed down his

attacks, trying to concentrate on the meanings behind each line. He knew that the sword stances and the verses matched each other; all he has to do is to grasp the meaning behind the verses and he'll be able to defeat this swordplay.

Yang Guo continued, "Stopping at the orchid garden, the horse is fed at Mount Hua. The eyes return unto the swan, the hand strumming the five strings." The verse was said with a modest tone but the sword strokes were towering and majestic, especially the last two stances which were extremely exquisite and sudden. It appeared to go to the east but went west, the sword hinted up but went down, one stance but two strokes, and it was difficult to tell what was real and what was false.

Xiao Longnu had now finished wrapping up her wound. She watched Yang Guo's swordplay and felt it was pleasing to the eye; but she had never heard him talk about this swordplay before so she asked, "Guo'er, what swordplay is this; who taught you?"

Yang Guo laughed, "I thought of it myself. Gu Gu, is it good? A few days ago I was resting in bed from some injuries and I saw a book of poetry by the bed. I thought the poems were quite nice so I committed them to memory. At the heroes' feast, Zhu Ziliu merged calligraphy into martial arts; I thought it would definitely be possible to merge poetry into martial arts."

Xiao Longnu said, "It's very good..."

Suddenly, Jinlun Fawang praised, "Brother Yang, I can only look on in awe at your intelligence and wisdom. The following verse is of course, "Bowing to and revering one's content, the good mood of the heart is too obscure, fishing

and searching for something, the trap is forgotten once the fish is caught.”

Gongsun Zhi’s mind lit up, “That monk is trying to help me.” He didn’t think about what the monk wanted but concentrated on the first line of the verse, ‘Bowling to and revering one’s content’, the sword will definitely be aimed upwards followed by a downwards stroke. He guarded his upper body with the black sword and chopped his gold saber from the middle of his body.

Jinlun Fawang was versed in both martial arts and culture. Although he lived in Tibet, he knew Han philosophies, their history and Confucian classics. When he heard Yang Guo reciting the poem, he knew from long ago what the following verses would be. He revealed this to Gongsun Zhi in hope that he would be able to use Gongsun Zhi to kill Yang Guo for him.

Gongsun Zhi did indeed manage to get the first move in when he heard this. Before Yang Guo unleashed his sword strokes, Gongsun Zhi had sealed off all of the sword’s paths while at the same time, chopping out his jagged golden saber from the middle of his body to attack him.

Luckily, Yang Guo had heard Fawang and was prepared for this, he didn’t continue on with his “Four Lined Poem Swordplay” and guarded his midriff with his sword while the middle finger of his left hand flicked out, striking the back of the golden saber.

Gongsun Zhi’s arm trembled and the joints in his hand felt slightly numb from this flick, he was shocked and thought, “This little punk has much strange kung fu.”

This flick of Yang Guo’s was the “Divine Release of the Flicking Finger” that Huang Yaoshi taught him; but he was

unable to subdue his enemy because his internal energy wasn't strong enough. If Huang Yaoshi performed this move, the jagged golden saber of Gongsun Zhi would have flown out of his hand as soon as it was struck. However, this flick of Yang Guo's was still good enough to allow him to regain the upper hand; he moved his sword forward and used Huang Yaoshi's "Jade Flute Swordplay". The "Divine Release of the Flicking Finger" and "Jade Flute Swordplay" both concentrated on attacking the opponent's pressure points. When they were used together, it was ingenious and subtle and even though Yang Guo's mastery of these skills wasn't refined; after a bout of urgent attacking it was still good enough to trouble Gongsun Zhi.

At that time, Qiu Qianchi called out again, "His sword is going for the waist, and his saber is chopping towards the neck". "The sword is going to slash towards your right shoulder while his saber guards his left." She called out every stance of Gongsun Zhi's in advance.

Yang Guo now held the upper hand completely. With his poetry ceased, Fawang was unable to tell where his sword would go and couldn't aid Gongsun Zhi.

Gongsun Zhi's family art the "Yin Yang Twin Blades" were inspected thoroughly by Qiu Qianchi and then subsequently improved by her. All of Gongsun Zhi's stances were known to her; no matter how sudden his changes were, Qiu Qianchi would call it out in advance. As they were absorbed in the battle, Qiu Qianchi suddenly called out, "Both his sword and saber are going to attack your upper body." These words were called out at just the exact time as Gongsun Zhi sent out both his saber and sword; it was now difficult for him to change his stance halfway through. Yang Guo had more than enough time to block this attack.

Yang Guo lowered his head and dashed forward while protecting his back with his sword. His left finger came out and jabbed the opponent's 'Ocean of Air' pressure point an inch and a half below the navel. Yang Guo was delighted with this successful attack at the first attempt. He thought that his opponent would suffer a serious injury with this attack but Gongsun Zhi's leg came out, striking him on the jaw.

Yang Guo was shocked and leapt to the side a few feet. He then remembered how strange the pressure points were on this person; previously he had used the golden sphere silk belt to strike his pressure points but it had no effect on him. Gongsun Zhi came at him once again.

Qiu Qianchi called out once again, "His blades will cross, the right sword attacking left, the left saber attacking right."

Yang Guo did not give it much thought and defended with all his might.

When it came to internal energy, Yang Guo was not a match for his opponent; he would have lost out long ago if it weren't for Qiu Qianchi's advice.

Yang Guo and Gongsun Zhi continued for another seven or eight hundred stances. The members of the valley watched with their hearts on the verge of jumping out of their mouths. At the same time Xiaoxiang Zi and the others were also fixed on the great battle, but they couldn't tell who would win it. In the midst of the blurs of the saber and sword, one could see Gongsun Zhi panting while Yang Guo was soaked with sweat. The movements of the two were now not as quick as before.

Gongsun Lu'E thought that if the two carried on like this, one of them would be seriously injured. Of course she didn't

want Yang Guo to lose; but she couldn't bear to see her father get hurt, so she whispered to Qiu Qianchi, "Mother, tell them to stop. We'll settle this by talking it over."

Qiu Qianchi gave a 'heng' grunt and said, "Pour two bowls of tea."

Lu'E was confused but did as she was told and brought the bowls of teas to her mother. Qiu Qianchi took off the piece of bloody cloth that was wrapped around the wound on her head. When she was knocked into the pillar, blood poured out of her head and it was Xiao Longnu who tore off her sleeve and covered her wound. The bleeding on her head started again as she took off the cloth.

Lu'E was alarmed and called out; "Mother!"

Qiu Qianchi called out, "I won't die!" She threw the bloody cloth onto her knees and took the bowls. Her four fingers held the bowls but the thumb of each hand was in the tea. The blood on her thumbs mixed into the tea. She quickly swirled the tea and the traces of blood were gone. She called out, "You should be tired now; have a bowl of tea!" She said to Lu'E, "Give one bowl of tea to each of them to quench their thirst."

Lu'E knew her mother hated her father deeply and wouldn't have any good intentions towards him. This bowl of tea wasn't meant to quench his thirst but to poison him. However, she poured the bowls of tea herself and there was no poison in any of them; they were just ordinary bowls of tea. It must be because her mother sympathized with Yang Guo. If her father didn't have a bowl, he would not stop and Yang Guo would not be able to take a drink. She saw that the two were really very tired so she went to the middle of the hall and called out clearly, "Please have some tea!"

Gongsun Zhi and Yang Guo were both very thirsty; when they heard Qiu Qianchi call out; they both stopped and jumped backwards.

Lu'E first took the tray of tea to her father. Gongsun Zhi knew that it was Qiu Qianchi who ordered her to bring these bowls of tea to him, so there'll definitely be something wrong with it. Most likely they had poison in them. He held up his hand and said to Yang Guo, "You drink first."

Yang Guo had no fear and casually picked up a bowl of tea; he placed it on his lip and took a sip.

Gongsun Zhi said, "Good, I'll have that bowl!" He took Yang Guo's bowl from his hand.

Yang Guo laughed, "It was your daughter who poured the tea; don't tell me you think there's poison in them?" Yang Guo took the other bowl of tea and drank it in one go.

Gongsun Zhi looked at his daughter's face and saw that it was calm and relaxed, he thought, "Lu'E loves that punk, of course there would be no poison in his cup of tea; I've already swapped the bowls, what have I got to be afraid of?" He too drank the bowl of tea in one go and then clashed his weapons, saying, "There's no need for a break, continue. Huh, if it weren't for that old witch giving you tips, you would have died from my black sword and golden saber long ago even if you had ten lives to spare."

Qiu Qianchi replaced the bandage on her head and said evilly, "His "Closure of the Pressure Points" has been defeated; you can hit his pressure points."

Gongsun Zhi felt a slight taste of blood on his tongue and was shocked; a shock that was indescribable. This particular family art has one big drawback; the practitioner cannot taste an ounce of meat otherwise this art will be

neutralized immediately. His ancestors were afraid that they'd taste meat by accident and so passed a strict order in the valley; no one can eat meat. Though the others didn't practice this art, they were still forced to be vegetarians. Gongsun Zhi had always been very careful; but how would he have known that Qiu Qianchi would actually use such an evil plan and put her own blood in the bowls of tea?

Yang Guo was not affected by drinking this bowl of blood containing tea; but the "Closure of the Pressure Points" technique that Gongsun Zhi had been training bitterly all his life was gone, just like that.

He turned his head around in fury and looked at Qiu Qianchi who had a plate of dates on her knees that had been served to the guests. She was eating them and savoring the taste. She said slowly, "I told you before, twenty years ago, this art of the Gongsun family is hard to learn yet easy to neutralize; it's not worth practicing."

Fire erupted in Gongsun Zhi's eyes and he raised his weapons, dashing forward towards Qiu Qianchi. Lu'E was alarmed and dashed in front of her mother to protect her. Suddenly a gust of wind brushed past her ear; it sounded like some kind of projectile.

Gongsun Zhi howled. Blood poured down from his right eye; he turned around and dashed out of the hall with his sword and saber. A trail of blood was left in his wake. His wretched howl was getting further and further away, gradually getting quieter and quieter until silence fell within the mountain walls of the valley.

Everyone looked at each other, wondering how Qiu Qianchi achieved this.

Only Lu'E and Yang Guo knew that she had used her date stone spitting kung fu to do this.

When Gongsun Zhi and Yang Guo were fighting, she had placed seven or eight date stones in her mouth in advance. She saw that Gongsun Zhi's martial arts had improved greatly; even if she made a sneak attack, he would be able to avoid them. When he's on his guard, it would be difficult to harm him. Because of this, she waited until he was completely absorbed in the battle before using the blood tea to defeat his "Closure of the Pressure Points" technique. While he was reacting furiously, she took the opportunity to suddenly launch her date stone at him. This was the one and only martial art she had and she trained it vigorously over the years; the power and accuracy of it was not below any of the world's greatest projectile arts. If it wasn't for Lu'E dashing forward and blocking her view, not only would both eyes of Gongsun Zhi's be blinded; the pressure point between his eyes would have also been struck. This would have immediately sent him to his death.

Lu'E couldn't bear this. She stood there stunned for a while; before calling out, "Father, father!" She wanted to go after him.

Qiu Qianchi said sternly, "If you want your father then go; don't ever see me again."

Lu'E stopped her feet; she was in a difficult position; but then she thought about how all of this was the fault of her father. All the suffering that her mother endured was tens of times greater than what he endured. Anyway, her father had long gone and she couldn't catch up even if she wanted to. She stopped and turned from the door, silently heading back into the hall slowly, with her head hung down.

Qiu Qianchi sat on her chair and looked to either side of her; she chuckled, "Good, you've all come here for a celebratory drink; won't everyone's mood being ruined if we don't have a drink?" Her icy cold eyes gave everyone

goose bumps; they were all afraid that she was going to spit out some kind of strange projectile without any warning. The people of the valley were afraid while Fawang, Yin Kexi and the others prepared themselves.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were both surprised with the state that Gongsun Zhi ended up in. They both let out a long sigh and reached out for each other's hand, holding it tightly. The two's thoughts were as one and they made their way towards the exit.

When they reached the door, Qiu Qianchi suddenly shouted, "Yang Guo, where are you going?"

Yang Guo turned around and made a long bow to her before saying, "Senior Qiu Lao, Miss Lu, we'll be leaving now." He knew that he didn't have long to live and so he didn't say things like 'I'll see you again'.

Lu'E returned the greeting and kept silent in misery.

Qiu Qianchi's face was filled with anger and she shouted, "I've betrothed my only daughter to you and you do not call me mother-in-law? And you're leaving just like that?"

Yang Guo was startled and thought, "Though you've betrothed your daughter to me, I didn't say that I accepted."

Qiu Qianchi said, "We've got everything here, decorations, candles and guests. We're martial artists, we'll get straight to the point; you two are getting married today."

Jinlun Fawang and the others had just seen Yang Guo fight Gongsun Zhi with his life for Xiao Longnu; when they heard Qiu Qianchi say this they all knew that there was going to be another great show. They looked at each other; some

showed a wry smile and some were shaking their heads slightly.

Yang Guo held Xiao Longnu's elbow with his left hand and his right hand held the handle of the 'Gentleman' sword. He said, "I am extremely touched by senior Qiu Lao's offer. But my heart belongs to someone else." He moved backwards slowly after he said this. He was afraid that Qiu Qianchi would spit out date stones at them in anger and so he held his sword just in case.

Qiu Qianchi's angry eyes swept over Xiao Longnu and said coldly, "Huh, that little seductress is indeed beautiful; no wonder both old and young go mad over her."

Lu'E said, "Mother, brother Yang and Miss Long decided to marry each other long ago; I'll tell you all the details later on."

Qiu Qianchi replied angrily, "What kind of person do you think your mother is? How can I take back what I've said? The one named Yang, my daughter is beautiful and she's more than worthy of you. But even if she was an ugly troll, I'm still going to make you marry her today."

When Ma Guangzuo heard how unreasonable she was he couldn't stop himself from laughing and calling out, "This particular couple in this valley are a perfect match: the husband forces a young girl to marry him while the wife forces a young man to marry her daughter and they don't want anyone else but them, right or wrong?"

Qiu Qianchi said coldly, "Wrong!"

Ma Guangzuo opened his mouth and laughed out loud. Suddenly a 'bo' sound was heard as a date stone flew towards the center of his eyes; the stone came like lightning and there was no way to avoid it. Ma Guangzuo lifted his

head in shock; a 'pai' sound was heard as three of his front teeth were knocked loose. Ma Guangzuo was furious and roared while he threw himself forward. Another two 'bo' sounds were heard as the 'Linking Jump' pressure point on his right groin and the 'Yang Pass' pressure point on his left leg were struck. Both his legs went limp and he fell down onto the floor, unable to get up.

Those three date stones were extremely quick. Yang Guo knew that Qiu Qianchi would make her move when Ma Guangzuo was laughing and drew his sword to go to save him; but it was too late. He picked him up and unsealed his pressure points. Ma Guangzuo admitted defeat; this bald old woman didn't move her legs or arms and was able to defeat him just by opening her mouth. He had great respect for her; he spat out the teeth and said with a mouthful of blood, "Old woman, you're more powerful than me; the one named Ma does not dare to offend you again."

Qiu Qianchi ignored him and stared at Yang Guo. She said, "You've decided to not marry my daughter, true?"

Gongsun Lu'E couldn't bear to suffer such embarrassment in front of everyone and took a dagger from her waist. She pointed it at her chest and said loudly, "Mother, if you ask again, then I'll kill myself right in front of your very eyes."

Qiu Qianchi opened her mouth and a stone shot out, hitting the handle of the dagger. There was great power behind that stone; the dagger flew and planted itself inches into a wooden pillar, the handle quivering in the candlelight.

Everyone gasped.

Yang Guo knew that his time would be wasted if he remained here for much longer so he flicked his blade with his finger and said clearly with the resonation of the blade, "The lonely rabbit, going east watching west. The clothes

are not of new; the person is not like that of before.” He motioned his sword in a flurry and turned around with Xiao Longnu’s hand held in his.

When Lu’E heard the last two sentences, ‘the clothes are not of new, the person not like that of before’, her hurt became even greater; she took off the ragged gown that Yang Guo had given her. She went to him and offered it back to him, saying, “Brother Yang, it’s better to have old clothes.”

Yang Guo said, “Thank you.” He stretched out his hand to take it. He and Xiao Longnu knew that Lu’E was deliberately standing in front of them so her mother wouldn’t be able to attack them with the date stones. Xiao Longnu had a faint smile on her face and nodded her head, showing her thanks.

Lu’E moved her lips to the side, telling them to leave quickly.

Qiu Qianchi mumbled ‘the clothes are not of new, the person is not like that of before’ a few times before she suddenly raised her voice and said, “Yang Guo, you don’t want my daughter; but don’t tell me that you don’t want your life as well?”

Yang Guo gave a bitter laugh and backed another step out of the hall.

Xiao Longnu’s heart trembled and said, “Wait.” She asked clearly, “Senior Qiu Lao, have you got an antidote for the Passion Flower poison?”

Lu’E had been thinking about this all along. Yang Guo gave the only Passionless Pill that her father had to Xiao Longnu while his poison had yet to be cleared. The only hope that he had was her mother, who might have a way to cure this

poison. But she knew that her mother would use this to blackmail Yang Guo, to force him into marrying her; this is why she hadn't mentioned this before. But in this urgent situation she could no longer care about her embarrassment and turned herself around, saying, "Mother, if it weren't for brother Yang, you would still be trapped down in that cave. Brother Yang has not done anything to offend you. We need to pay back this kindness; please cure his poison."

Qiu Qianchi chuckled, "Repay kindness with kindness? Repay vengeance with vengeance? How can the world's vengeance and kindness be distinguished like that? Was that thanks I got from Gongsun Zhi?"

Lu'E said loudly, "I hate men whose hearts are not loyal, men who like the new and forget those of old. If the one named Yang Guo wanted to leave his lover of old and marry me, I'd rather die than marry him."

Those words rang in Qiu Qianchi's ears, but after a thought, she immediately knew what her daughter was trying to do. Her daughter loved him dearly and if he agreed to marry her, she would leap for joy. Because the situation was pressing, her daughter was just hoping that she would save him first before doing anything else.

Jinlun Fawang, Yin Kexi and the others looked at each other in amusement as they watched this second show of a forced marriage. Fawang now knew that Yang Guo had been poisoned and he was feeling pleased. He hoped that Yang Guo would stick to his choice, by refusing to marry Lu'E to save his life; but he was worried about the craftiness of Yang Guo who might lie about the marriage to get the antidote and then refuse. Then he thought that even if Yang Guo tried something, he's there to see through him and alert Qiu Qianchi to his tricks.

Qiu Qianchi's eyes swept across all the guests slowly and then said, "Yang Guo, amongst the people here there are those who wish that you live and those who wish that you die. Think about whether you want to live or die."

Yang Guo placed his arm around Xiao Longnu's waist and said with a clear voice, "If either of us can't marry the other, then we'd rather die together."

Xiao Longnu smiled sweetly and said, "Yes!" The two of them were as one; their love for each other was so deep that life and death was no longer anything important.

Qiu Qianchi did not understand Xiao Longnu and said, "If I don't save him then he will die, do you understand this? Do you know that he can only live for another thirty six days?"

Xiao Longnu said, "If you do agree to save him and let us be together for a few more years then of course we'll be extremely touched. If you refuse, we've still got thirty six days together, that's fine as well! In any case, if he dies, I won't carry on living." Her beautiful face showed no signs of concern as she said this.

Qiu Qianchi looked at her and then looked at Yang Guo; she saw the two staring at each other, their love for each other so passionate, their devotion to each other so intense. This was something that she had never experienced nor even thought about before. So such devoted lovers actually existed in this world. When she saw how dedicated they were, she couldn't help but muse over her and Gongsun Zhi and the way they ended up. She gave a long sigh and tears rolled down her cheeks.

Lu'E went to her and threw herself into her arms; she cried, "Mother, just cure him please; then we'll go and find uncle; he misses you, doesn't he?"

Qiu Qianchi's tears stirred her compassion, but then she immediately thought about the words in the letter from her brother Qiu Qianren; "Ever since first brother died at the hands of Guo Jing and Huang Rong on Iron Palm Peak..."

She herself was crippled and her brother had become a monk, saying something like 'I dropped my knife of slaughter and followed the ways of Buddha'; does this mean that her brother's death can never be avenged? Yang Guo's martial arts weren't weak; though he refuses to marry her daughter she could order him to help her avenge her brother.

She then said, "There were actually quite a lot of Passionless Pills; but apart from three pills, the rest were ruined by me when I soaked them in frosty arsenic water. Out of the three pills, that bastard Gongsun Zhi took one, another he took from me when I was drunk and that was the pill that you gave to that girl. There is only one pill remaining in this world. This pill has been with me for over twenty years. If one doesn't prepare a Passionless Pill for themselves while living in the Passionless Valley, then they are not in complete control of the fate of their lives. Right now, I haven't got long to live and my daughter might not stay here for much longer..." She then took out the last remaining Passionless Pill on this earth slowly and broke it in two with her nail. She took half a pill and placed it in her palm before saying, "I can give you the pill. You don't want to marry my daughter, fine but you have to promise to do one thing for me."

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu looked at each other, both surprised with her sudden kindness. The two weren't worried about life and death; but since there's a way for them to live, of course they'd be happy to take this chance. Both said at the same time, "We'll do our best to fulfill Senior's request."

Qiu Qianchi said slowly, "I want you to get me the heads of two people."

When Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu heard this, they both thought that she wanted them to kill Gongsun Zhi. Yang Guo had no good feelings towards Gongsun Zhi and now that he's lost an eye and his "Closure of the Pressure Point" has been destroyed, it won't be hard to kill him even though he still has his other martial arts remaining. But he was Gongsun Lu'E's father; the girl loves Yang Guo deeply, but killing her father might cause great distress for her and he couldn't help but hesitate.

Xiao Longnu thought that although Gongsun Zhi was evil, he was still the one who saved her life. From Qiu Qianchi's expression, if she didn't kill him Qiu Qianchi would never agree to give the pill to Yang Guo.

Qiu Qianchi saw that they had troubled expressions on their faces and said coldly, "I don't know what ties these two people have with you but I must kill them." She then flung half of the pill lightly upwards in her hand.

From her tone, it didn't appear that she was talking about Gongsun Zhi so Yang Guo asked, "With whom does Senior Qiu Lao have a feud? Whose head do you want me to take?"

Qiu Qianchi said, "Didn't you hear that scoundrel when he was reading out that letter? The names of the people who killed my brother are Guo Jing and Huang Rong."

Yang Guo was delighted and called out, "That's great. Those two people killed my father; even if Senior Qiu Lao didn't ask I'd still kill them."

Qiu Qianchi's heart trembled and said, "Is this true?"

Yang Guo pointed to Jinlun Fawang and said, "This Reverend has crossed paths with those two people. I told him about this matter before."

Qiu Qianchi looked at Fawang and he nodded his head and said, "But at that time, brother Yang helped Guo Jing and Huang Rong to oppose me."

Xiao Longnu and Lu'E were both furious with Fawang for trying to stir up trouble time after time; they both stared at him with anger.

Jinlun Fawang ignored them and smiled, "Brother Yang, did such a thing happen?"

Yang Guo said, "Yes. Once I've avenged my father I'll need to exchange a few stances with Reverend Jin."

Jinlun Fawang folded his arms and said, "Good, good!"

Qiu Qianchi held up her left hand and said to Yang Guo, "I don't care if this is true or false, just take this pill."

Yang Guo went forwards to accept it when he saw that it was just half a pill and immediately understood, he laughed, "I need to get their heads in exchange for the other half?"

Qiu Qianchi nodded and said, "You really are clever; you didn't need anyone to tell you."

Yang Guo thought, "It's better to take half a pill than take nothing." He took the half pill and swallowed it.

Qiu Qianchi said, "There was only one Passionless Pill left in the whole wide world. You've just taken half of it. The other half will be kept in an extremely secretive place. If you bring the heads of Guo Jing and Huang Rong in eighteen days time then I'll give you the other half. Even if you hold me at knifepoint and threaten me or throw me down that

cave again I will never give it to you. The word of Qiu Qianchi's is as solid as rock, I've never taken back what I've said. To all the guests, please leave on your own accord. Master Yang, Miss Long, we'll meet again in eighteen days time." She then closed her eyes and ignored everyone.

Xiao Longnu asked, "Why have you set a deadline of eighteen days?"

Qiu Qianchi said with her eyes closed, "The Passion Flower poison in his body originally would have reacted in thirty six days time. Now that he's taken half a passionless pill, the poison has all come together and is now concentrated in one place; the poison will now react twice as quickly. The poison will be cleared if he takes the other half of the antidote eighteen days from now, otherwise... otherwise... ha-ha!" After she said this, she waved out her hand, ordering everyone to go quickly.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu both knew that this person does not listen to reason and so the two bid farewell to Lu'E and quickly left the Narcissus Manor. Yang Guo couldn't be bothered to find a boat to get out of the valley and instead, he and Xiao Longnu utilized their lightness kung fu and left the valley by going over the mountains.

Yang Guo had stayed in this valley for only three days; but within these three days, he had experienced many near deaths. Now that he's left this place of danger with his lover, it was like he was in a different world.

It was now dawn. The two of them stood on top of a mountain ridge shoulder to shoulder and looked down at the valley. As the morning light sparkled on the luxuriant emerald forest, their eyes were filled with the green color. They felt filled with boundless joy; their hearts floating and swaying around as if they were at one with the clouds.

Yang Guo held Xiao Longnu's hand and the two walked up to a locust tree. He said, "Gu Gu..."

Xiao Longnu leaned on him and smiled, "I don't think you need to call me Gu Gu again."

Yang Guo had stopped viewing her as his Master long ago; the reason he called her 'Gu Gu' was because he was used to it. When he heard this, his heart was filled with a sweet feeling and he stared into her black eyes. He said, "What should I call you?"

Xiao Longnu said, "Call me whatever you want; it's up to you."

Yang Guo thought for a little while and said, "The happiest time of my life was when we were in the tomb together. At that time, I called you Gu Gu. Just let me call you Gu Gu until I die."

Xiao Longnu laughed, "I used to spank you in those days; were they happy days?"

Yang Guo stretched out his arms and embraced her. Yang Guo's soul was completely enchanted as he smelled the fragrance of Xiao Longnu's scent mixed up with the scents of the surrounding flowers and trees. He seemingly lost himself and said softly, "Let's just live like this happily for the next eighteen days; we don't need to go and kill Guo Jing and Huang Rong. Living happily and peacefully for eighteen days is better than rushing about and fighting for our lives."

Xiao Longnu smiled and said, "We'll do whatever you say. Before, I wanted you to listen to me; but from now on, I'll listen to you." She has always had an icy cold disposition; but now she was filled with love. She felt warm all over and

felt that the greatest thing in life was to listen to Yang Guo with all her heart and soul.

Yang Guo looked at her startled; and said slowly, "Why are there tears in your eyes?"

Xiao Longnu took his hand and stroked her cheek gently with the back of his hand. She said tenderly, "I... I don't know." After a while, she said, "It must be because I love you too much."

Yang Guo said, "I know what you are sad about."

Xiao Longnu lifted her head and suddenly tears burst from her eyes as she threw herself into his arms. She cried, "Guo'er, you... you... we've only got eighteen days; how is that enough?"

Yang Guo patted her shoulder lightly and said softly, "No, it's not enough."

Xiao Longnu said, "I want you to treat me like this forever; I want a hundred years, a thousand years, ten thousand years."

Yang Guo lifted her head and kissed her on her pale red lips. He said resolutely, "Fine, we'll go kill Guo Jing and Huang Rong." When he tasted her tears on his tongue, the love in his heart was stirred and his whole body felt like as if it wanted to explode.

Suddenly, a voice laughed out loudly from some high place to the left of them and said, "You don't have to be that intimate."

Yang Guo turned his head around and saw Jinlun Fawang, Yin Kexi, Xiaoxiang Zi, Nimoxing and Ma Guangzuo standing shoulder to shoulder about a hundred feet away. The person who said this was Jinlun Fawang. When the two

left the valley hurriedly together, Fawang and the others followed. The two of them were oblivious to everything around them; they didn't see or hear anything but each other. When the two stood below the locust tree acting lovingly towards each other, they did not notice that Fawang and the others were watching them from faraway.

Yang Guo recalled the many times that Fawang tried to stir trouble for him in the valley which almost cost him his life on many occasions. If he could turn back time he would chose to kill Fawang. He had the chance when Fawang was recuperating on the mountain top instead of helping him. He's meant to be a great Master of this generation; yet he repays kindness with ingratitude.

Xiao Longnu saw the fiery anger in Yang Guo's eyes and said, "Ignore them, those people will never experience a second of the happiness that we have."

Ma Guangzuo called out, "Brother Yang, Miss Long, let's leave. There's nothing around here in these wild mountains; no wine, no meat, it's boring around here."

Yang Guo just wanted to spend some quiet time with Xiao Longnu but these people had to come and disturbed them. However, he knew that Ma Guangzuo meant well and so he said clearly, "Brother Ma, you go first, I'll be there in a second."

Ma Guangzuo said, "Fine, just hurry up when you've finished."

Jinlun Fawang laughed, "Who needs you to worry about them? They just want to spend eighteen days here on this wild mountainside."

Everyone had heard Qiu Qianchi talk about how Yang Guo's poison would react in eighteen days. When Ma Guangzuo

heard this he couldn't stop himself from getting angry and grabbed hold of Fawang's sleeve, cursing him, "Bald scoundrel, you really are evil! We came here together with brother Yang; you should have helped him but you didn't. Instead you tried to stir things up; what are you trying to do?"

Fawang gave a wry smile and chuckled, "Are you going to let go?"

Ma Guangzuo said angrily, "I'm not letting go; what are you going to do about it?"

Fawang threw his right fist towards his face.

Ma Guangzuo said, "Fine, you want to fight?" He raised his massive hand to grab Fawang's fist but this fist of Fawang's was a decoy; his left hand suddenly came out and pushed him on the back. He used soft and hard force at the same time, causing the great body of Ma Guangzuo to fly away and down the mountainside. Luckily for Ma Guangzuo, the mountainside was covered in long green grass and he was thick skinned so he wasn't seriously injured. However, his forehead was covered in green bruises. He roared and climbed back up.

When Yang Guo saw the two starting to fight, he knew that Ma Guangzuo would suffer at Fawang's hands so he went forward to help him. But it was too late; he had moved just three steps and Ma Guangzuo had already been sent tumbling downwards.

Though Ma Guangzuo wasn't the sharpest tool in the box; but he knew how to protect his life. He saw that he would not be able to beat that monk face to face and he cried and hollered, "Oh no, oh no, that bald bastard's broken my arm."

Xiaoxiang Zi and Nimoxing did not like the fact that Jinlun Fawang had been proclaimed the First Protector of Mongolia by Khubilai; they were now even angrier with him when they saw how brutish he was; the two glanced at each other.

Xiaoxiang Zi said, "Reverend's martial arts are indeed excellent, you are worthy of the title of the First Protector of Mongolia."

Fawang said, "You're too kind." Fawang knew that the two wanted to make their move on him right now while Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were also edging forward to make their move. As to what Yin Kexi was thinking, Fawang wasn't too sure. He knew his martial arts were strong; but if the five great fighters join together and attack him all at once, not only will he not be able to fight them off; but his life will also be threatened. While his mouth replied dutifully, in his mind he was thinking of a way to escape.

While Ma Guangzuo was calling and hollering, he was making his way slowly towards Fawang. Suddenly, he threw out a fist and struck the back of Fawang's head. With Fawang's abilities, this sneaky attack of Ma Guangzuo's would never have succeeded; but at this moment in time, he was just concentrating on Yang Guo, Xiaoxiang Zi and the others. The idiot he had ignored actually managed to strike him on the back of his head. This attack was hammer like; hammering him into a starry daze. In his anger, Fawang sent his elbow backwards striking Ma Guangzuo squarely in the chest. Ma Guangzuo called out and his body fell forward right onto the shoulders of Fawang. Fawang's legs bent a little and he dashed straight down the mountainside.

Yang Guo was the first one to chase after Fawang as everyone shouted. Though Fawang had a great three hundred 'jin' (150kg/330lbs) body on his shoulders, he still

moved like the wind. Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu, Nimoxing and the others all had first-rate lightness kung fu; but since Fawang made the first move, they were not able to catch up with him for the first hundred feet. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu increased their speed and gradually got closer to him.

Fawang suddenly stopped and he turned his head around. He laughed, "Fine, are you all going to come up on me at once or will it be one on one?" He held Ma Guangzuo and placed his head next to a large rock on the mountainside. He was about to smash Ma Guangzuo into the rock.

Yang Guo went around him to first block his way before saying, "If you kill him, then of course we'll all attack you at once."

Fawang laughed and threw Ma Guangzuo to the ground before saying, "Do you think I'd trouble myself with this kind of idiot?" He then sent his arms into his gown and out came a white light in his left hand and a yellow light in his left; he had taken out his silver and bronze wheels. He clashed the wheels together and the sounds resonated throughout the valley. He said arrogantly, "Who's first?"

Yin Kexi laughed, "I'm just a merchant, so I'll just watch from the side and see everyone test each other's skills."

Fawang thought, "That's one less strong foe for me to face."

Xiaoxiang Zi thought that he should let someone else go first and allow them to wear Fawang down a bit before he stepped in and finished him off. So he said, "Brother Ni, your martial arts are better than mine, please go ahead!"

When Nimoxing heard his words, he knew what Xiaoxiang Zi was planning; but then he thought about how good his martial arts were. He was matchless in India and had never

met a match in his life; even if he can't beat Fawang he wouldn't lose to him. He went over to one side and casually grabbed hold of a large rock. He shouted, "Fine, I'll test out your two circular things." He picked up the large rock and smashed it towards Fawang's chest. This rock was at least three hundred 'jin' and everyone was startled when they saw him using this to fight.

Jinlun Fawang did not know that this dwarf would possess such strength and actually use a large rock to attack him. He didn't dare to meet it head on and dodged to the side and swept his bronze wheel across the back of Nimoxing. Nimoxing used the large rock to block the attack. The wheel and rock collided with each other and sparks flew everywhere with the sound of the collision echoing throughout the valley.

Fawang's left arm felt slightly numb and he thought, "This dark dwarf's martial arts are extremely strange, I cannot be careless. But even if he was stronger, how long can he last holding up such a large stone?" So he moved his wheels, circling it around Nimoxing's body.

Yang Guo helped Ma Guangzuo up and then stood next to Xiao Longnu. Both were surprised with Nimoxing's great strength and his strange martial arts.

The two of them battled for a while before suddenly Nimoxing shouted, "A Po Xing!" He lifted the large rock and shot it forward towards Fawang.

This throw was one of the greatest skills of Indian monks; it was called "Elephant Shooting of Shijia". In the scriptures it recorded; 'When Shijiamouni (Buddha) was still a prince, he left the city one day and found an elephant blocking his path. He lifted the elephant by the legs and shot it up into the sky. The elephant came back down three days later and

when it landed it made a deep ditch, now called the Shooting Elephant Ditch. This was of course just a story that describes the unimaginable wonders of Buddhism. The later Indian martial artists developed a powerful external martial art, that allowed the user to shoot large objects and was subsequently named after this story. Nimoxing called upon the divine strength of this technique and shot the boulder towards Fawang. The large rock traveled extremely fast towards Fawang, creating a ferocious wind as it went forward.

Though Fawang was greatly skilled, he still didn't dare to receive such a large heavy object head on and moved out of the way. Nimoxing suddenly flew up and struck the large stone with his palms, sending the stone back towards Fawang once again. This second attack was much stronger than the first because it was the combined force of the second propulsion from his palms with the remaining force from the first attack.

Fawang was better at martial arts than Nimoxing; but because he had never seen this "Elephant Shooting of Shijia" he was actually forced on the back foot. When he saw the rock coming towards him again, he could only move out of the way once again. Nimoxing pressed his advantage and the force of the rock become more and more ferocious as he repeatedly increased the force behind it.

Fawang thought, "If this continues I'm going to lose to this dark dwarf; I need to think of something else. Luckily he's up by himself; when I kill him that zombie face would not dare to come up against me. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu have been poisoned and won't be able to use their "Pure Heart of Jade Maiden Swordplay" smoothly."

Suddenly, the thunderous sounds of horses were heard from nearby. Flags fluttered in the air as a group of men on

horseback rushed towards them. Fawang and Nimoxing were in the middle of a heated battle and had no time to look. Yang Guo and the others saw it was a division of Mongolian soldiers on horseback armed with bows and sabers. About a hundred feet from Yang Guo and the others, the leader of the division held up his hand to order his men to stop. The soldiers all reigned in their horses.

Below the flag, a person watched the battle from his horse for a while before riding up towards them and called out, "Stop, stop!" This person wore a yellow gown and carried an iron bow; it was the Mongolian Prince Khubilai.

When Nimoxing heard his voice, he struck the rock with his palms and sent it rolling down the mountainside. Vast amounts of dust and dirt were thrown up as the boulder rolled down the slope.

Khubilai leapt off the horse and held Fawang with his left hand and Nimoxing with his right. He laughed, "So you two are exchanging a few stances here; it really was a great spectacle." He knew that the two were having a real battle but he said this to keep the face of both sides. Fawang gave a wry laugh and said, "Brother Ni's martial arts has its good points; a rare sight, a rare sight."

Nimoxing's eyes glared at him and said, "I thought the First Protector of Mongolia would be someone extraordinary, but you're just... bah!"

Fawang was furious and thought, "Do you really think I can't beat you?" He was just about to say something when Khubilai laughed, "This place has everything, but where's the wine? Men, bring wine! We'll drink three bowls here!"

Mongolians have always lived in the wild and made the world their home. Eating and drinking outside was no different than eating in a hall to them. One of the guards

brought some wine and food to them and laid a rug on the ground.

Khubilai looked at Xiao Longnu and was shocked, "There's actually a girl with such beauty here on this earth." He saw Yang Guo and her holding hands, standing next to each other intimately; he asked Yang Guo, "Who's this girl?"

Yang Guo said, "This is Miss Long; she is my Master and she is also my wife."

After the life and death experiences in the Passionless Valley; the world's customs and traditions meant absolutely nothing to him. He deliberately wanted everyone in the world to know that 'I, Yang Guo, have married my Master'.

Mongolians weren't as strict as the Han when it came to adhering to custom and tradition. When Khubilai heard this he wasn't surprised, but instead, he had great respect for Xiao Longnu when he heard that she was the one who taught Yang Guo martial arts. He laughed, "You two are indeed a match made in heaven, excellent, excellent. Everyone, let's congratulate these two." He raised his bowl of wine and drank it all in one go.

Fawang gave a wry laugh before he too raised his bowl and drank it all in one go. The others followed and Ma Guangzuo drank three bowls in one go.

Xiao Longnu did not hate or like Mongolians; but when she heard Khubilai praising her and Yang Guo as a great match, she was wild with joy. She drank half a bowl of wine and her face became even more beautiful. She thought, "All the Han say that I and Guo'er can't marry each other; while this Mongolian Prince kept on saying excellent, excellent. It looks like Mongolians are more knowledgeable than the Han."

Khubilai laughed, "I missed everyone here while you were gone for these past three days. However, matters at Xiangyang were getting urgent and so I was unable to continue hosting our esteemed guests. I'd left requests for you at the camp to meet up with the army at Xiangyang to aid us. Things will go a lot smoother now that we've met here."

Fawang asked, "Your Highness, how has our army been doing in our attacks on Xiangyang?"

Khubilai frowned and said, "Lu Wenhuan, the General who's guarding Xiangyang, is just a mediocre General; the person I'm worried about is Guo Jing."

Yang Guo's heart trembled and asked, "Is Guo Jing really at Xiangyang?"

Khubilai said, "This Guo Jing is my Senior. He was my father's sworn brother and was my grandfather Genghis Khan's most beloved General. This person was both brave and wise; he commanded an army at Xiyu and used an extraordinary plan to succeed in his task. My father once said to me, 'The Song courts are led by an incompetent Emperor and scheming ministers; they have timid Generals and a weak army. Although they have great numbers they will not be able to defend against our skilled army. But if you come across Guo Jing, you must be careful. Father's foresight was indeed right; our army has attacked Xiangyang many times but all attempts have been unsuccessful. The reason behind all this is Guo Jing.'"

Yang Guo stood up and said, "That Guo Jing is the person who killed my father; I would like to request the order to assassinate him."

Khubilai said with pleasure, "I have gathered all you heroes together for this exact task. But from what I hear, Guo Jing

is the best martial artist of all the Han and he's got many able people under his command. I have ordered many warriors to go and assassinate him but all have failed. They were either captured or killed; none of them returned. Brother Yang might be brave but it would be difficult for you to achieve this on your own. I want to send everyone here to go into Xiangyang and to work together to kill him. Once this person is killed, Xiangyang will fall."

Fawang, Xiaoxiang Zi and the others all stood up; they crossed their arms and said, "We will use every ounce of our strength to follow your Highness' order."

Khubilai was delighted and said, "It doesn't matter who kills Guo Jing, and those who go along to help will also be greatly rewarded. However, the Khan will be informed of the name of the person who killed Guo Jing, be given the title of Viscount and be called The Greatest Warrior of Mongolia."

Xiaoxiang Zi, Nimoxing and the others did not care about the Viscount position; but if they got the title of the Greatest Warrior of Mongolia, they'll be famous throughout the world, and achieve their life's dream. The influence of the Mongolian army has spread far and wide; they have countless li of territories in the western regions and have taken two thirds of the land of China. It would take a fast horse a year to travel from the centre of their empire to its boundaries. If they had the title of the Greatest Warrior of Mongolia, all of the world's heroes, bar none, will be in awe of them. Everyone's spirits were motivated and even Fawang reacted to this news; there was a glint in his eyes when he heard it.

Yang Guo gave a bitter laugh and shook his head. Xiao Longnu looked at him lovingly but she was thinking, "Who cares about the title of Viscount, or the title of the Greatest

Warrior of Mongolia? I just hope that you can stay alive and well."

Everyone drank a few more bowls of wine and then stood up. A Mongolian soldier led some horses to them. Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu, Fawang and the others leapt onto the horses and followed Khubilai, riding southwards towards Xiangyang.

It was a scene of destruction along the way; nine out of ten buildings were empty and the ground was covered with corpses. Whenever the Mongolian soldiers see Han, they would kill them with unrestrained violence. Yang Guo was furious when he saw this and wanted to stop them. But he hesitated because of Khubilai, and thought, "The Mongolians are so violent and cruel and treat my Han people worse than animals; after I've killed Guo Jing and Huang Rong, I'm going to kill a few of the vilest Mongolian soldiers to vent my anger."

A few days later, they arrived outside of Xiangyang. The two sides had now been fighting for around a month and the ground was covered with the remnants of battle; broken spears lay strewn everywhere; blood and bodies covered the ground.

When the Generals and commanders of the army outside Xiangyang learned of the Fourth Prince Khubilai's arrival, they went to greet him thirty li outside of Xiangyang. The sounds of the horses' hoofs and the clanging of the soldiers' armour reflected the grandeur of the army. When the Generals and commanders saw Khubilai's banner, they all leapt off their horses and knelt down by the roadside.

Khubilai rode up near them and reigned in his horse. He took a look around and didn't say anything for a long while. He then gave a 'humph' grunt and said, "Xiangyang city has

been under attack for so long yet you still have not captured it; isn't that a disgrace to the mighty Mongolian army?"

All the Generals and commanders replied at the same time, "We deserve to die; please punish us your Highness."

Khubilai whipped his horse and galloped forward. All the Generals and commanders kept themselves down on the ground for a long time, not daring to get up.

Yang Guo saw that Khubilai was very peaceful and easy going towards him, Fawang and the others; but when he was disciplining his army he was very strict. He thought, "The Mongolian army is so strong and so disciplined; how can the Song defend against them?" He frowned as he thought about this.

Early next morning, the Mongolians attacked Xiangyang once again. Arrows and stones were sent towards the city like rain and hail. The soldiers at the front of the attack placed ladders around the city of Xiangyang and climbed up. The city was guarded tightly; groups of eight soldiers held a wooden ram in their arms and were knocking the ladders off the city walls. After a prolonged attack, a hundred or so Mongolian soldiers eventually managed to get themselves on top of the city walls. The Mongolian army hollered and another hundred or so soldiers climbed up towards the walls for support. The watchman's rattle rang urgently and a group of archers appeared, shooting arrows down on the advance, forcing them back. Another group of Song soldiers appeared with torches in their hands and they burned the ladders, sending the Mongolians on the ladders plummeting down to the ground.

Shouts and calls could be heard from the city as a group of men appeared on the walls with long spears and sharp

sabers, attacking the Mongolians who had climbed up onto the city walls. This group of men did not wear the uniform of the Song army; some wore short black garments, while some wore long green gowns. When they attacked, they didn't attack in a group; their movements were swift and showed that they possessed martial arts. The Mongolians who had managed to get themselves on top of the city walls were all great warriors of the Mongolian army and had never met their match before. But when they came across this group of Han, they were all killed. Some died on the city walls while others fell to their deaths. There was an especially commanding Han in the Song army. This person wore a grey gown and was fighting empty handed; he scanned the walls and when he saw Han soldiers in distress, he would immediately dash over and help them. Wherever his palms went, Mongolian soldiers fell; it was like a tiger in amongst a herd of sheep.

Khubilai was commanding this battle himself and when he saw how brave and heroic this Han was, he was stunned and didn't say anything. After a while he sighed and said, "Out of all the warriors in the world, who can compare with this man?"

Yang Guo was standing beside Khubilai and asked, "Highness, do you know who that is?"

Khubilai was startled and said, "Could it be that he's Guo Jing?"

Yang Guo said, "Yes!"

By this time, most of the hundreds of Mongolians soldiers who had climbed up the city walls had been killed. Only three brave Sergeants of the Jagen (100 man squad) still survived and they were fighting on in a corner with their spears and shields. A Noyan (rank in Mongolian army,

leader of a division of 10,000) below blew their horn and another group of soldiers attacked the city walls, intending to bring the three remaining Jagen Sergeants back to safety.

Guo Jing roared and stepped forward. One of the Jagen Sergeants thrust his spear forward towards him. Guo Jing grabbed the spear and pushed forward. He then kicked out at the shield of another Jagen Sergeant with his left leg. Though these two Jagen Sergeants had great valor, how could they resist the divine strength from such a push and kick? They somersaulted down from the wall and fell to their deaths.

The third Jagen Sergeant was fairly old and had grey hair. He knew that today was the day when he would meet his maker. He swung his long saber wildly like a mad tiger. Guo Jing stretched out his left hand and grabbed the wrist of the hand that was holding the saber. He was about to chop down with his right hand when he suddenly stopped in alarm. The Jagen Sergeant recognized Guo Jing and called out, "Jin Dao Fu Ma (Golden Blade Consort), it's you!" Note: He was betrothed to Genghis Khan's daughter Hua Zhen during his time in Mongolia.

He was actually one of the soldiers that accompanied Guo Jing when he was sent to conquer the western regions. When Huang Rong made the plan to take Samarkand, he was amongst the first warriors who made the attack on the city.

Guo Jing recalled past memories and said, "You are E'er Dou?"

The Jagen Sergeant cried when he saw that Guo Jing remembered his name and he called out, "Yes, yes it's me."

Guo Jing said, "Fine, I'm going to spare your life today because of what happened in the past. If I capture you again, there will be no mercy." He turned to one of his aides and said, "Get a rope and send him back down!" Two soldiers tied a rope around E'er Dou's waist and lowered him.

E'er Dou was a famous warrior in the Mongolian army; when the Mongolian soldiers saw him being lowered down on a rope by the Song army, they were surprised. They didn't know what had happened and retreated a few hundred feet. The Song soldiers at the top of the city stopped firing their arrows and the two sides ceased the battle for the time being.

When E'er Dou got down, he turned to Guo Jing and bowed to him on the ground. He said clearly, "Since Jin Dao Fu Ma (Golden Blade Consort) is here, this servant will not dare fight again."

Guo Jing stood at the top of the wall with a commanding aura around him and shouted out, "The commander of the Mongols, listen: Years ago the Mongols and Han worked together to get rid of the Jin; why are you Mongols now invading our land and killing our citizens? We have ten times more people than you Mongols have. If you don't quickly retreat then we'll gather our armies and kill the hundreds of thousands of soldiers that you have. We'll not even leave them with a body that can be buried." He spoke in Mongolian with great vigor. Though the wall was high and there was a large distance between the two armies, the Mongolian soldiers could hear every single word clearly and they couldn't stop themselves from looking at each other pale faced.

A Noyan led E'er Dou to Khubilai and told him what had happened. E'er Dou then told Khubilai about how he

followed Guo Jing on the expedition to the west and described how the Jin Dao Fu Ma (Golden Blade Consort) used his troops like a god. How he subdued and defeated the enemy, explaining all this with great enthusiasm.

Khubilai's face turned heavy and shouted, "Execute him!"

E'er Dou called out, "Please, I've done nothing!"

The Noyan said, "Please your Highness, this E'er Dou has achieved many great deeds for our army..."

Khubilai waved his hand and four guards came. They took E'er Dou away and executed him, bringing his head back to Khubilai. All the Generals trembled with fear.

Khubilai said to the Noyan, "Apart from the money owed to E'er Dou's family for his services to the army, give his wife ten 'jin' (5kg/11lbs) of gold, thirty slaves and three hundred livestock."

The Noyan was puzzled but replied, "Yes, yes."

Khubilai said, "I've killed him yet I'm also rewarding his family; you do not understand this, do you?"

All the Generals bowed to him and said, "Please enlighten us your Highness."

Khubilai said clearly, "That Jagen Sergeant bowed down to Guo Jing and talked about how powerful Guo Jing is; shouldn't he die for disturbing the morale of the soldiers? But he was brave and led the attacks; he fought with his life up until he reached the final man, shouldn't he be rewarded?" All of the Generals bowed to him.

But after this event, the Mongolian army's morale was low. Khubilai knew that if he continued to battle on today, he would just suffer more losses. He was exasperated when he

saw the hundreds of corpses of his experienced spirited soldiers lying across the battlefield. He then looked at the fortified wall of Xiangyang; it was guarded tightly and there was no way to break through. He couldn't stop himself from releasing a sigh. He immediately gave the order to retreat back forty li.

Two of his guards looked at each other and both said, "This servant would like to share the burdens of your Highness and will go to dampen the morale of the Song." They leapt onto a horse and galloped towards the city. The two mounted their bows and shot the arrows towards Guo Jing.

The two were skilled riders and their archery skills were accurate; their horse galloped like the wind and the arrows were shot out like lightning. By the time warning cries were heard from both the top and bottom of the city walls, the arrows had reached Guo Jing's chest and stomach. It appeared that Guo Jing had no way to avoid the arrows; but he gathered his hands towards himself and grabbed the arrows. He then raised his hands and shot the arrows back. Before the two guards had turned their horses around, the arrows had arrived and shot through their chests. The two fell onto the ground. The Song army at the top of the city wall cheered thunderously.

Khubilai was not pleased and ordered his men north. The army had traveled for a few li when Yang Guo said, "There is no need to be troubled your Highness; I will now go to the city to take Guo Jing's life."

Khubilai shook his head and said, "That Guo Jing is both valiant and wise; he indeed does live up to his reputation. This matter is more troublesome than I thought it would be now that I've seen him with my own eyes."

Yang Guo said, "I lived with Guo Jing for many years and I have helped him before; he will have no suspicions about me. There's a saying; a spear out in the open is easy to dodge, but an arrow in the dark is hard to avoid."

Khubilai said, "When you were standing next to me watching the battle, you were afraid that he would recognize you from the top of the city's walls?"

Yang Guo said, "I was wary of this so when you were attacking the city, Miss Long and I wore hats to cover our faces and fur garments to hide our bodies; he would not be able to recognize us."

Khubilai said, "Well then, I hope you succeed. I will keep my word about the rewards."

Yang Guo casually thanked him and he was about to turn around to Xiao Longnu to leave with her when he saw Jinlun Fawang, Xiaoxiang Zi, Yin Kexi and the others with strange expressions. His mind lit up, "These people are afraid that I'll get the title of the Greatest Warrior of Mongolia if I succeed in killing Guo Jing; they'll definitely try to stop me." He turned to Khubilai and said, "Your Highness, I have something to tell you. The reason I am going to assassinate Guo Jing is because I want to avenge my father's death and because I need his head in exchange for an antidote to save my life. If I succeed in helping your Highness, I cannot accept the title of the Greatest Warrior of Mongolia."

Khubilai asked, "Why?"

Yang Guo said, "My martial arts can't compare with these people; how can I be the Greatest Warrior of Mongolia? I can only make my move if your Highness promises me this."

Khubilai heard him say this with great sincerity and thought that this really was what he wanted. He then looked at the

expressions of the others and then knew what he meant by this. He said, "Since you've decided this, I can't change your mind. I will not force you."

When Fawang and the others heard this, they indeed did show signs of relief.

Yang Guo turned his horse around and headed for Xiangyang with Xiao Longnu. They took off the disguises along the way and dressed themselves back into Han clothing. It was beginning to get dark by the time they reached the walls of the city; when they got there, a closed gate greeted them. Soldiers with torches were patrolling the city walls.

Yang Guo called out, "My name is Yang Guo, and I've come to see Guo Jing, Master Guo."

The General who was guarding the city walls heard his calls and saw that he was accompanied by a girl. He immediately went to tell Guo Jing the news.

After a while, two youngsters arrived at the top of the city wall and looked down at them. One of them called out, "So it's brother Yang. There are only two of you?"

When Yang Guo saw the Wu brothers he thought, "When Guo Jing killed my father, I wonder whether or not the Wu brother's father was there to help him?" He said, "Big brother Wu, second brother Wu, is Uncle Guo in the city?"

Wu Xiuwen said, "Come in."

The soldiers opened the gate and lowered the drawbridge to allow Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu through.

The Wu brothers led the two to a large house. Guo Jing's face was filled with joy and he dashed out of the house to meet Yang Guo. He greeted Xiao Longnu and then held

Yang Guo's hand and smiled, "Guo'er, you've come here just in time. The Mongols are attacking us intensely and you can help me now that you're here; the citizens of the city are very fortunate."

Xiao Longnu was Yang Guo's Master and Guo Jing treated her as an equal, politely inviting her into the house while he treated Yang Guo with great care.

Guo Jing held Yang Guo's left hand. When Yang Guo thought about the act that his father's murderer was doing now, pretending to be caring and loving towards him, he really wanted to draw out his sword and kill him right there and then. But he was worried about how good Guo Jing's martial arts were so he didn't dare to make a rash move. He forced himself to smile and said, "I wish Uncle Guo great health." He was filled with anger and did not kneel down to him. Guo Jing was a broad-minded person and did not take little details like this to heart.

When they arrived in the hall, Yang Guo wanted to go and see Huang Rong. Guo Jing laughed, "Your Auntie Guo is about to give birth and hasn't been feeling well in the last couple of days; you can see her in a few days time."

Yang Guo was delighted and thought, "Huang Rong is extremely wise and clever; I was afraid that she would be able to see through my plan. But she's ill at the moment; it looks like even heaven wants me to succeed."

As they were talking, a soldier came in and reported, "General Lu requests Master Guo's presence at a feast to celebrate our victory against the Mongols today."

Guo Jing said, "Go and tell the General, thank you for the invitation. However, I have a guest and cannot attend."

The soldier looked at Yang Guo and saw that he was just a young man with nothing special about him; he didn't know why Guo Jing would treat him with so much respect that he would actually reject the General's invitation to the celebratory feast because of him. His mind was full of questions as he went back to report this to Lu Wenhuan.

Guo Jing prepared a family meal in the inner hall in honour of Yang Guo's and Xiao Longnu's arrival. Zhu Ziliu, Liu Youjiao, the Wu brothers and Guo Fu were in attendance. Zhu Ziliu kept on thanking Yang Guo, saying that only he could have gotten the antidote from Huo Dou to cure his poison. Yang Guo just gave a lifeless smile and said a few modest words.

Guo Fu saw that Yang Guo had an aloof expression on his face. She called out, "Brother Yang."

Guo Jing scolded, "Fu'er, if it weren't for brother Yang risking his life to save you from the hands of Jinlun Fawang, not only would you have been in trouble but also your mother; why aren't you thanking him?"

Guo Fu stood up and said, "Thank you brother Yang for saving me."

Yang Guo said, "We're not strangers, why is there a need to say thanks?"

Guo Fu didn't say anything and sat down. During the meal, Guo Fu frowned and it seemed that there was something on her mind. The Wu brothers were seemingly avoiding her glances. But Liu Youjiao and Zhu Ziliu were extremely happy and were chatting about the victory against the Mongols.

By the time dinner finished, it was around eleven o'clock. Guo Jing told his daughter to take Xiao Longnu inside to

rest and he himself took Yang Guo to his room to sleep in the same bed. When Xiao Longnu was about to go inside, she glanced at Yang Guo, telling him to be careful. Her face was filled with love and concern. Yang Guo was afraid that his intentions would be revealed and so turned his head away, not daring to look at her directly.

Guo Jing led Yang Guo to his room and praised Yang Guo for saving Huang Rong, Guo Fu and the Wu brothers from Jinlun Fawang at the restaurant and the stone formations. He then asked about what had happened to him afterwards.

Yang Guo was afraid that he might let something out if he talked too much; and so he kept the events of how he met Cheng Ying, Lu Wushuang, Sha Gu and Huang Yaoshi from him. He just said, "After I was injured, I recuperated in a wild valley. Afterwards, I met my Master again and we decided to come here to help Uncle Guo."

Guo Jing got himself readied for bed and said, "Guo'er, there is a strong enemy pressing against the boundaries of our land; the Song Empire is in great danger. Xiangyang is a barrier for our Song land; if this city falls then the thousands and millions of citizens that we have will become the slaves of the Mongols. I have seen the brutality of the Mongols when they kill with my own eyes; it causes one's blood to boil."

When Yang Guo heard this, he remembered the tragic and terrifying scenes of the actions of the Mongols he encountered during his travels. He couldn't stop his teeth from clenching in anger and his chest filled with fury.

Guo Jing continued, "Why do we learn martial arts? Lending a helping hand and getting people out of danger is of course something that we must do; but this is just one of the minor parts of being a hero. The people of Jianghu call

me 'Hero Guo' because they respect me for serving my country and my people and guarding Xiangyang without care for my life. But my abilities are limited, I cannot get my people out of this trouble; I really am not worthy of the title 'Hero'. You are ten times more intelligent than me; your future achievements will definitely exceed mine. I just hope that you remember these words, 'a hero's imperative is to serve your country, to serve your people'. You will be a famous true hero of the people if you remember this."

These sincere words moved Yang Guo. He saw that Guo Jing had a stern face on him and although Guo Jing was his father's murderer, Yang Guo couldn't help but feel respect for him. He replied, "Uncle Guo, after you've gone, I will definitely remember the words that you have said tonight."

How would Guo Jing know that Yang Guo was planning to assassinate him tonight? He stretched out his hand and stroked his hair and said, "Yes, bend your body to the task until your dying day. If our country perishes then your Uncle Guo's life will go along with it. I have heard that Khubilai is skilled in warfare; he retreated today but he will come back to attack again soon. There's definitely going to be a great battle in the upcoming days. It's going to be a spectacular battle. It's getting late, let's go to sleep."

Yang Guo replied, "Yes." He undressed himself for bed and hid the dagger from the Passionless Valley on him. He thought, "I'll wait until you're deep in your sleep and then stab you; even if your martial arts were a hundred times better, how could you avoid this attack?"

Guo Jing had fought in a great battle today and he immediately fell asleep. How could Yang Guo sleep with the thoughts that he had? He lay on the bed and listened to the breathing of Guo Jing. Every inhalation and exhalation was

spaced out with an extremely long gap; he admired how profound Guo Jing's internal energy was.

Some time passed. It was silent everywhere with the exception of the noises from the guards. He sat up quietly and felt out the dagger from underneath his clothes. He thought, "I'll kill him first and then go kill Huang Rong. She's a pregnant woman, what can she do? Once I've killed them, I'll immediately go back to the Passionless Valley with Gu Gu to get the other half of the antidote. Once I've got the antidote, I will go back to the tomb with Gu Gu and enjoy the pleasures of life; who cares about whether this empire is Song or Mongol?"

He felt extremely pleased with himself as he thought about this; but suddenly he heard the crying of a baby from one of the neighboring residences. He then heard the mother of the baby comforting it; the baby gradually stopped crying and fell asleep.

Yang Guo's heart trembled and remembered the time when he saw a Mongolian soldier holding up his spear in midair with a baby hanging off the end of it; the baby had not died and was crying miserably. He thought, "It would be easy for me to kill Guo Jing now; but once he dies, it will be difficult to protect Xiangyang. This city has thousands and thousands of babies; won't they all be killed by the Mongolian soldiers for fun? My avenging of my father will lead to countless deaths, is this right?"

But then he thought, "If I don't kill him, how can I get the antidote from Qiu Qianchi? If I die, Gu Gu will not live on." Nothing in the world could compare to his love for Xiao Longnu and he made up his mind, "Fine, fine, who cares about the lives of Xiangyang; who cares about the Empire of the Song? When I was suffering, who cared about me apart from Gu Gu? The people of the world don't love me;

why should I love the people of the world?" He raised the dagger and gathered all his strength into his right hand. He aimed for Guo Jing's chest.

The candlelight in the room had gone out long ago but Yang Guo had the ability to see things in the dark. When he was about to thrust the dagger, he glanced over at Guo Jing's face. There was a peaceful expression on his face and he was in a deep sleep; all the love that Guo Jing shown him when he was younger suddenly surfaced in his heart. How he treated him lovingly on the Peach Blossom Island; how he took him all the way to Mount Zhongnan to learn martial arts; how he betrothed his only daughter to him. He couldn't stop himself from thinking, "Uncle Guo is a straight and honest man; he is an extremely sincere and kind person; he cannot be the person who killed my father. Could it be that Sha Gu was confused and was talking rubbish? If this knife goes forward and kills an innocent man, I won't be able to redeem this with ten thousand deaths. I'll wait; I need to make sure."

He put away his dagger slowly and thought about all the things that had happened since he'd met the Guo couple; pondering over every single memory. He remembered how Huang Rong always felt uneasy with him around; there were many times when she and Guo Jing were talking about something but would immediately change the subject once she saw him. There was no question about it; the couple was keeping something from him. He continued thinking, "When Auntie Guo took me as a disciple, how come she only taught me to read and write and didn't teach me martial arts? Could it be that the reason why Uncle Guo treats me so well is because he's trying to make himself feel better about killing my father? But if he really did kill my father then how come he is not wary of me at all? He lets me sleep with him and gives me the chance to kill him with one stab

of a knife. He was troubled as his thoughts went to and fro like the tides.

Though Guo Jing was sleeping, he noticed that Yang Guo's breathing was quickening and he opened his eyes. He asked, "Guo'er, what is it?"

Yang Guo trembled a little and said, "It's nothing."

Guo Jing laughed, "If you're not used to sleeping with someone, then I'll go and sleep on the table."

Yang Guo said quickly, "No, it's nothing important."

Guo Jing said, "Fine, just go to sleep. We martial artists need to make sure our states of mind are well rested."

Yang Guo replied, "Yes."

Another while passed. Yang Guo could not hold it in any longer and asked, "Uncle Guo, that year when you took me to Mount Zhongnan, I asked you a question at the Cow Head Monastery at the foot of Mount Zhongnan."

Guo Jing said, "What was it?"

Yang Guo said, "When I asked the question you became furious and smashed down on a stone obelisk; that was why you got all the trouble from the Quanzhen Taoists; do you remember what I asked?"

Guo Jing thought for a while and said, "Yes, I remember, that day you asked me how your father died."

Yang Guo stared at him and said, "No, I asked you who killed my father."

Guo Jing said, "How do you know that someone killed your father?"

Yang Guo choked, "Could it be that my father died just like that?"

Guo Jing stayed silent for a while before giving out a sigh and said, "It was no one's fault but his that he died like that."

Yang Guo sat up; he was extremely emotional and said, "You're lying! How can someone cause their own death? Even if my father killed himself, someone must have forced him to do it."

Guo Jing felt sad and tears rolled down from his eyes. He said slowly, "Guo'er, your grandfather and my father were very close; your father and I were sworn brothers. If your father was killed by someone don't you think I would have avenged his death?"

Yang Guo shook all over and he wanted to say, "You're the one who killed him, how can you avenge him?" But he knew that if he said this, Guo Jing would be wary of him and if that happened, it would be difficult to assassinate him. He nodded his head and stayed silent.

Guo Jing said, "Your father's death is a long complicated story, it cannot be explained in one sentence. When you asked me all those years ago, you were still young; you wouldn't have understood all the causes behind it. That is why I didn't tell you then. You can distinguish between right and wrong now that you've grown up. Once we've made the Mongols retreat, I'll tell you all about it from the beginning." He then laid his head back on his pillow and went to sleep.

Yang Guo had always known him to be completely honest; if he said something it was truthful and he never lied. But when he heard his words he wasn't convinced and was semi suspicious of him. He cursed himself, "Yang Guo, Yang Guo,

you have always done things with an indomitable will; whatever you dared to do you did, why are you acting so timid today? Could it be that you're afraid of how good his martial arts are? If I keep on changing my mind tonight and lose this opportunity, Huang Rong might find out about my motives in the near future. When that happens, I'm afraid that even Gu Gu will be killed without a corpse that can be buried as well."

When he thought about Xiao Longnu, his spirits stirred again and he stretched out his hand to check the dagger. The dagger tip was hot after being pressed against his body.

End of Chapter 20.

Shen Diao Xia Lu (Divine Eagle, Gallant Knights)

by Jin Yong



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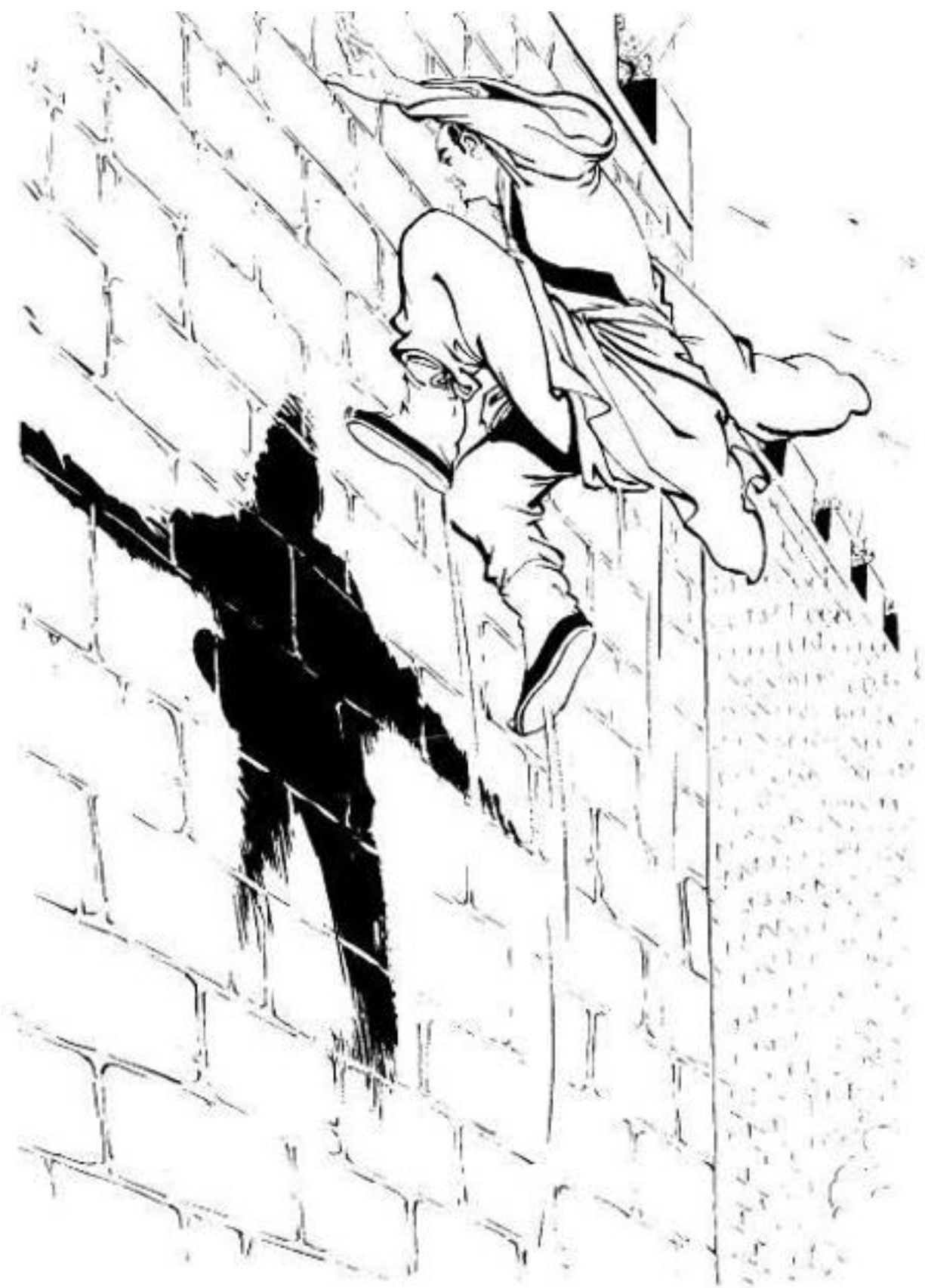
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Chapter 21 - Fierce Fighting at Xiangyang

Translated by Noodles



Guo Jing's left foot flicked up against the wall and he flew up over ten feet. His right feet followed and he rose up another ten feet. Silence broke out on the battlefield as tens of thousands spectators fixed their eyes on him.

Yang Guo was just about to take his dagger out and stab Guo Jing when he suddenly heard three light flicks on the outside window. He quickly shut his eyes and kept still.

Guo Jing immediately woke up alarmed and said, "Rong'er? Is there some kind of problem?" No more noises came from the window.

Guo Jing saw that Yang Guo was in a deep sleep and could hear his even snoring. He saw how easily he slept and didn't want to wake him, so he got up from the bed quietly and went to the door. He opened the door and saw Huang Rong in the courtyard signaling him with her hand. Guo Jing went to her and said quietly, "What's the matter?"

Huang Rong did not reply and lead him to the garden. She took a look all around before saying, "I heard you and Guo'er's conversation. He's up to no good, do you know that?"

Guo Jing was startled and asked, "He's up to no good?"

Huang Rong replied, "I could tell from his words that he's been suspicious of you killing his father."

Guo Jing said, "He may be suspicious but I've promised that I'll tell him all about the reasons for his father's death in detail."

Huang Rong said, "Are you really going to tell him everything?"

Guo Jing said, "I have always blamed myself for his father's tragic death. Though Brother Yang Kang went down the wrong path, we did nothing to save him."

Huang Rong gave a 'humph' and said, "How could he be saved? I just wished that I'd killed him earlier. If I had, would your Masters have died on Peach Blossom Island?" When Guo Jing recalled this bitter event, he couldn't prevent himself from heaving a long sigh. Huang Rong said, "Brother Zhu sent Fu'er to tell me that there's something odd with Guo'er and she told me how you two were going to sleep on the same bed. I was worried that something might happen and I have been on guard by the window all along. It's better not to sleep in the same room as him. You should know that people's thoughts are hard to fathom. His father... his father died from poison as a result of striking me on the shoulder."

Guo Jing said, "It can't be said that you killed him."

Huang Rong said, "Both of us had the thought of killing him in our minds and in the end he did die because of me. Although we didn't kill him with our own hands, there's not much difference."

Guo Jing thought deeply for a while and said, "You're right. I won't tell him about this. Rong'er, you've been up for half the night, quickly go back to your room and rest. After tonight, I'll move to the camp." He knew that his wife's wisdom exceeded his a hundred times and although he didn't believe that Yang Guo had any ill intent towards him, he did as she said. He stretched out his hand and put his arm around her waist and led her slowly into the inner halls. He said, "Guo'er used every ounce of strength he had to take back the position of the Chancellor of Wulin for us. He knows what's right and wrong when it comes to matters of the country; he risked his life in saving you and Fu'er twice; how can his father compare with his heroic nature?"

Huang Rong nodded her head and said, "Yes, this is something that's wonderful to see in this young man, but he has two clouds hanging over him. One is the reasons for his father's death and two, his relationship with his Master. I made Miss Long leave him but Guo'er seems to be all-knowing; somehow he found her again. From their expressions, it looks like they'll never be separated again."

Guo Jing kept silent for a while and then suddenly said, "Rong'er, you're even more all-knowing than Guo'er; think of a way to stop Guo'er from going down the wrong path."

Huang Rong sighed and said, "I don't even know what to do about our daughter let alone Guo'er. Brother Jing, I just have you in my heart and you have just me in yours. But our daughter isn't like us; she has two men in her heart, she treats each of the Wu brothers the same. This makes things difficult for us parents."

Guo Jing accompanied Huang Rong to her room and helped her onto her bed. He covered her with a blanket and held her hand, sitting by the bed waiting for her to go to sleep. The pair had been busy with defending the country and hadn't had a chance to spend any quiet time with each other like this. The two looked at each other, in silence, in peace.

Huang Rong held her husband's hand and brushed it gently across her cheeks. She whispered, "Brother Jing, you name our second child."

Guo Jing laughed, "You know I'm not good at that; why are you making fun of me?"

Huang Rong said, "You still say that you're not able. Brother Jing, there's no one in the world that's better than you." She said these words with great sincerity.

Guo Jing lowered his head and kissed his loving wife on her face gently. He said, "If it's a boy, we'll call him Guo Polu, but what if it's a girl?" He thought for a while and shook his head saying, "I can't think of one, you think of a name."

Huang Rong said, "Elder Qiu named you 'Jing' so that you would not forget the shame of the Jing Kang years. The Jin have been destroyed but now the Mongolians are threatening us. This child is going to be born in Xiangyang; we'll call her Guo Xiang so in the future she'll remember that she was born in this city when it was surrounded by warring soldiers."

Guo Jing said, "Good, but hopefully she will not be like her sister. She's grown up now and she still makes us worry about her."

Huang Rong smiled lightly and said, "It doesn't matter if we have to worry but..." She gave a sigh and said, "I really hope that it will be a boy so that the Guo's will have an heir."

Guo Jing stroked her hair and said, "A boy or a girl; will it not be the same? Just go to bed, don't think too much." He pulled the blanket over her and blew out the candles. He returned to his room and saw Yang Guo in a deep sleep. The chime for the third hour could be heard. He returned to the bed and slept.

How would he know that when he was talking to his wife, Yang Guo was hiding behind the pavilion and heard every single word they said? When Guo Jing returned to the inner halls with his wife, Yang Guo stood there in a daze. His mind was repeatedly going over what Huang Rong had said, "I just wished that I killed him earlier... his father died from poison as a result from striking me on the shoulder... both of us had the thought of killing him in our minds and in the end he did die because of me." He thought, "There's no more doubts, my father died because of the two of them. Huang Rong is really wily; she's already suspicious of me. If I don't make my move

today then I don't think I'll ever get another chance like this." He then returned to the room and slept on the bed quietly, waiting for Guo Jing to return.

Guo Jing slipped himself on to the bed and heard Yang Guo's faint snoring. He thought, "This child sleeps so soundly." He rested his head lightly on the pillow, afraid that he would wake him up. A short while passed and he was about to fall asleep when he suddenly felt Yang Guo turning his body around slowly but while he was turning over, his snoring continued. Guo Jing was startled, "Everyone stops their snoring when they turn over in their sleep. There's something wrong with his breathing, could it be that when he's practicing his internal energy he circulated it in the wrong way? This isn't anything trivial." The thought of Yang Guo pretending to sleep never entered his mind.

Yang Guo slowly turned around slowly and saw that Guo Jing did not notice him so he continued his faint snoring and got down from the bed. He had wanted to make his move while he was beneath the blanket but he was worried about how close he was to Guo Jing. It would be extremely dangerous for him. If Guo Jing sends out a last gasp palm at him then surely he would be killed. He had thought about sitting up to do it but he was still worried about how good Guo Jing's martial arts were. In the end he decided to first get off the bed and stab Guo Jing in one of his vital areas before escaping out of the window. He was also afraid that if he stopped his snoring, Guo Jing would notice, so he kept up the pretence while he got down from the bed. But by doing this, Guo Jing was fooled even more. Guo Jing was thinking, "Could it be that the child has a sleepwalking disease? If I make a noise now, he would break out in a shock, his chi in his dan tian would surge the opposite way and he would immediately fire deviate." So he didn't make a move and listened out for his actions.

Yang Guo took out his dagger slowly and braced it against his chest with his right hand. He made his way to the bed step by step and suddenly gathered his chi into his arm to make his attack. Just as he was about to thrust the dagger, he heard Guo Jing call out, "Guo'er, what kind of nightmare are you having?"

Yang Guo was extremely shocked and he immediately darted out of the window. He was fast but Guo Jing was faster; before he touched the ground Guo Jing had already managed to grab him. Yang Guo's thoughts went to despair, he knew that his enemy was much stronger than him and it would be of no use to resist so he closed his eyes and kept silent. Guo Jing carried him back into the room. He placed him on the bed and sat him up with his hands hanging down in front of him, assuming the form of practicing Xuan Men chi. Yang Guo was bitter and afraid, "I wonder what kind of evil method he's going to use to torture me." He suddenly remembered Xian Long Nu. He breathed in deeply and wanted to call out to her, "Gu Gu, I've been captured, quickly run away."

When Guo Jing saw him suddenly breathe in deeply and circulate his chi, he was even more convinced that he was having problems with the circulation of his chi and thought, "In a situation like this one can only breathe in slowly and shallowly, it's extremely dangerous to breathe in so quickly and deeply like this." He quickly placed his palm against Yang Guo's lower abdomen.

Yang Guo's 'dan tian' was suppressed by Guo Jing's profound internal energy and he couldn't call out. He was concerned for Xiao Longnu's safety and struggled until his face went red but with his 'dan tian' suppressed, he couldn't move an inch. Guo Jing said slowly, "Guo'er, you were too anxious in circulating your chi; this is called desiring speed and not transmission. Stop moving, I'll help return your chi back to their original sources."

Yang Guo was startled and didn't know what he meant by this; but then he felt a warm gradual chi entering his 'dan tian' from his palms that was extremely comforting. He then heard Guo Jing say, "Slowly expel your chi and slowly let this warm chi transmit through the 'Water Divide' to the 'Interior Strengthening' through the 'Great Tower Gate', 'Turtledove Tail' to the 'Jade Hall', 'Florid Canopy', first clear the conception vessel, ignore the other meridians.

After hearing these words and feeling his chi clearing his meridians, he more or less gathered what was happening. He thought, "Shocking! He thinks I've lost my mind due to me suffering a fire deviation." He secretly circulated his internal energy and deliberately let his chi run wild, appearing not to be in control. Guo Jing was worried and increased the power in his palms, gathering his wild chi into one place. Yang Guo's internal energy was now not shallow. Guo Jing found it slightly difficult to cope for a while when Yang Guo sent his chi surging wildly around his body. He had to waste around an hour's time before he managed to return his contrary chi back into their original channels.

After this struggle, Yang Guo was completely drained of strength and Guo Jing too was extremely tired. The two of them sat in meditation. The sky lightened before they had recovered.

Guo Jing smiled, "Guo'er, are you okay now? I didn't know that your internal energy has reached such a good level already; even I almost couldn't control it."

Yang Guo knew that in trying to save himself, Guo Jing had wasted a lot of his internal energy and was touched by this. He said, "Thank you uncle Guo for saving me; last night I was almost crippled."

Guo Jing thought, "Last night while you were confused, you actually raised a dagger to kill me; luckily you didn't know

about this, otherwise wouldn't you be ashamed of yourself?" He was afraid that if Yang Guo knew about this he would feel sorry about it so he changed the subject and said, "Come with me outside of the city, we'll take a look at the city's defenses."

Yang Guo replied, "Yes!" The two of them mounted a warhorse each and rode shoulder to shoulder outside of the city.

Guo Jing said, "Guo'er, the internal energy of the Quanzhen sect is the most orthodox in the world, though progress is slow, you will not run into any trouble. You can learn other sect's and school's martial arts but when it comes to internal energy it would be advisable to practice Xuan Men martial arts. We'll study this together once the enemy has retreated."

Yang Guo said, "Don't tell Auntie Guo about me fire deviating last night. If she finds out she'll laugh at me for learning Long Gu Gu's unorthodox martial arts and blame me for making Uncle Guo suffer."

Guo Jing said, "Of course I won't say. Miss Long's martial arts aren't unorthodox; it's just that you weren't concentrating and didn't practice with a clear mind." Yang Guo knew that if Huang Rong found out about this she would immediately know the truth. When he heard Guo Jing promise not to tell Huang Rong, his mind relaxed.

The two of them headed west of the city and arrived at a stream. Guo Jing said, "Though this is a small stream, it is very famous; it is called the Tan Torrent."

Yang Guo said, "Oh. I have heard people talk about the story of the Three Kingdoms; they mentioned that Emperor Liu of Shu leaped over the Tan Torrent on horseback. So, the Tan Torrent is located here."

Guo Jing said, "The horse that Liu Bei rode that year was called De Lu; the horse handler said that it would harm its rider. But in the end De Lu actually leaped over the Tan Torrent and escaped from the pursuing army, saving Emperor Liu of Shu's life in the process." When he talked about this, he couldn't stop himself from thinking about Yang Guo's father Yang Kang. He gave a heavy sigh and said, "The people of the world are just the same as the horse Du Lu; to the good it does good, to the evil it does evil. Is there such a thing as a definite good or evil person? The only difference between the two is that there is a contrast in thought."

Yang Guo's heart trembled and he took a look over at Guo Jing. There was an extremely hurt expression on his face; it appeared that these words weren't meant as an attack on him. Yang Guo thought, "Your words might be right but what is good? What is evil? You and your wife killed my father, could that be the actions of someone who's good? Your words really are brash; you don't know how shameful you are." He had always had great respect for Guo Jing; but from now, whenever he remembers how his father died at their hands, evil thoughts filled his mind.

The two rode on for a little while and arrived at the top of a hill. From above one could see the flow of Han going southwards; refugees from all over were descending on Xiangyang. Guo Jing stretched out his horsewhip and pointed at the refugees. He said, "The Mongolians must have intensified their slaughter of our people in Sixiang, destroying the homes of our citizens. They're abominable."

Looking down from the hill, one could see, by the side of the road, a stone slab with some words written on it. It said: Minister of Works for the Tang Dynasty, Du Fu's hometown lies there.

Yang Guo said, "Xiangyang is no ordinary city. So the hometown of this great poet is here."

Guo Jing swept his whip and recited, "The great city unlike metal, the small cities of over ten thousand zhangs... the joined clouds of lined up battles, the flying birds unable to rise beyond. Self-guarding with ruin, how can Xi Dou be recovered? ... Struggling with long halberds, history needs one man."

Yang Guo heard him recite this with great passion and he recited it himself; "Self-guarding with ruin, how can Xi Dou be recovered? Struggling with long halberds, history needs one man. Uncle Guo, this is a really good poem, was it written by Du Fu?" Guo Jing said, "Yes. A few days ago, your Auntie Guo and I were discussing the defense of Xiangyang and this poem by Du Fu came up. She wrote it out for me. I really like this poem but my memory is bad. I went over this poem many times but all I can remember are just a few lines. There have been many educated men in our history who have written poems; but over the years, they have proclaimed Du Fu as the greatest poet of all and it's all because of his worry for his nation and people."

Yang Guo said, "You said, 'a hero's imperative is to serve your country, serve your people', literature and martial arts are different but the same can be applied to both."

When Guo Jing heard him grasp this he was delighted and said, "I do not understand much about literature; but no matter what one becomes in their life, a merchant, a slave, a soldier, as long as the thought 'serve your country, serve your people' is there, one can be a true man, a true hero."

Yang Guo asked, "Uncle Guo, do you think you will be able to defend Xiangyang?"

Guo Jing thought for a while and then pointed to the hills and trees to the west before saying, "In Xiangyang's history, the most famous person is Zhuge Liang. Twenty 'li' (10km) west of here is a thriving place. It was the place where he lived in seclusion. Coarse people like me can't fathom the deeds that he did saving our nation and bringing peace to our people. He once said that all he knew was that one must follow the phrase 'bending your body to the task until your dying day'. Whether it would lead to success or failure, he didn't know. When your Auntie Guo and I talked about whether Xiangyang can be defended or not; we ended up with these same words."

Just as they were talking, they saw that the refugees who were at the doors of Xiangyang had suddenly turned around while the refugees behind kept on flowing forward towards Xiangyang. It was chaos.

Guo Jing was shocked and said, "Why aren't the guards letting them into the city?" He galloped towards the city and saw a line of archers with their bows armed pointing at the refugees.

Guo Jing called out, "What are you doing? Quickly open the gates." When the guards saw that it was Guo Jing, they quickly opened the gates and let him and Yang Guo in.

Guo Jing said, "These people are being persecuted by the Mongolians, why aren't you letting them in?"

The general guarding the gates said, "General Lu said that spies have hidden themselves amongst the refugees; we cannot let them in for that reason."

Guo Jing shouted, "Even if there are one or two spies, how can we show no regard for these hundreds of lives? Quickly open the gates."

Guo Jing has been guarding the city for a long time now and had many great achievements; though he did not have an official post, the general guarding the city did not dare to disobey his orders and opened the city gates. At the same time, he ordered a messenger to report this to Lu Wende.

Old and young all converged on the city. Suddenly, a dust cloud appeared far away; the Mongolian army was moving in from the north. The Song soldiers scattered and went back inside the walls of the city. A large group of people stood out in front of the oncoming enemy; they were all clothed in rags and all had a stick in their hands, none had a real weapon and they were scattered. They called out, "Don't shoot arrows here; we're Song citizens as well!"

The Mongolian army however sheltered themselves behind the refugees.

Ever since the times of Ji Si Khan, whenever the Mongolian army attacked a city, they would first send the citizens of the surrounding country towards the city they were attacking. If the soldiers who were guarding the city weakened their resolve at this sight, the Mongols would immediately come forward and attack. By using this method, the Mongolian army was able to slaughter the citizens of the nation they were attacking and defeat their opposition in the city, killing two birds with one stone. It was extremely brutal and cruel but effective. Guo Jing had been with Mongolian army a long time and knew about this tactic, but there was nothing he could do to counter it. The Mongolian soldiers held the spears and long sabers to the front as they forced the citizens of the Song forward. The people were forced closer and closer and the people closest the city began to climb up the ladders.

Lu Wende rode his horse and took a look around at what was happening. When he saw the urgent situation they were in

he immediately ordered, "Defending the city is the main priority, fire the arrows!"

Arrows rained down and many people were struck. Those who weren't fell back. The Mongolian army chopped heads with their sabers and pierced bodies with the spears and the refugees were forced back towards the city. Yang Guo stood next to Guo Jing and watched this tragic scene in anger.

Lu Wende called out, "Fire the arrows!" Arrows rained down once more.

Guo Jing shouted, "Stop, you can't kill good people!"

Lu Wende said, "In such an urgent situation, even if it is a good person, we have to kill them."

Guo Jing shouted, "No, how can you kill good people wrongly?"

Yang Guo's heart trembled, "You can't kill good people wrongly! How can you kill good people wrongly?"

Guo Jing called out, "My Beggar Clan brothers and my Wulin friends follow me!" He then rushed down towards the city gates. Yang Guo followed him.

Guo Jing said, "You suffered an injury when practicing chi last night; you cannot exert any kind of strength today. Go back to the city wall and watch what's happening."

Yang Guo saw his fellow Han being treated worse than animals by the Mongolian army and wanted to go down with Guo Jing and do some killing. He was startled when he heard this but he couldn't tell Guo Jing that last night was just an act; so he returned back up the city wall. Guo Jing led a group of people and opened the western gate. They rushed out and attacked the Mongolian flank. The Mongolian troops

who were forcing the refugees forward turned towards Guo Jing.

The people Guo Jing was leading were good fighters of the Beggar Clan and patriots that had been gathered from all over China. They shouted and attacked; over a hundred Mongolian soldiers were immediately forced off their horses. The Mongolian army saw that their thousand soldiers were not able to fend them off and so another thousand came forward from the side. The Mongolian soldiers were all experienced, brave and vicious; though the group Guo Jing was leading knew martial arts, they were not able to subdue the Mongolians for the time being. When the refugees saw that the Mongolian soldiers were not pushing them forward any longer, they scattered.

A horn blew from the east and two Minghan regiments (division of 1000 men) surged forward. Another two Minghan regiments from the west dashed forward and surrounded Guo Jing and his group. Lu Wende was scared witless when he saw the might of the Mongolian army; how would he dare to send men out for a rescue?

Yang Guo stood at the top of the city walls and kept on going over what Guo Jing had said, "You can't kill good people wrongly! How can you kill good people wrongly?" When he saw Guo Jing surrounded he thought, "All the guards had to do was to let some arrows fly and kill a few people and they would have been able to stop this Mongolian attack. The reason Uncle Guo is in all this danger is because he didn't want to kill good people wrongly. He doesn't know these people yet he risks his life to save them; why did he want to kill my father?"

He saw the tragic killing below but all he could think about was this riddle; "He and my father were sworn brothers; this isn't any ordinary kind of relationship, but in the end he still

wanted to harm him. Could it be that my father was an evil person?" Ever since he was little he had always thought of his father as someone who was chivalrous, brave and heroic; one of the greatest men on earth. To acknowledge that his father was an evil person was something that he could not do. But in his heart, he had the feeling that his father could not compare to his Uncle Guo; but whenever he had this feeling, he forced it back down. Right now however, he couldn't stop himself from thinking about this point.

The cries below the city walls were ear shattering. Guo Jing and his group dashed left and surged right but they still were unable to break out. Zhu Ziliu led a group of men and the Wu brothers and Guo Fu led another to save them; but the Mongolian horn was blown once again and another four Minghan units surged forward to the city gates. Khubilai was indeed skilled in warfare. If the city gates opened to save Guo Jing and the others, the four divisions would break into the city.

Lu Wende was shocked senseless now and ordered, "Do not open the city gates!" Two hundred men who were ordered to guard the gates were told to kill anyone daring to try to open the gates. General Wang led a group of archers at the top of the city walls and they fired their arrows incessantly.

Chaos ruled both outside and inside the city while Yang Guo's mind was in the same state; sometimes he wished that Guo Jing would perish in this battle, while at others, he wished that Guo Jing would be able to drive the enemy back.

Suddenly, the formation of the Mongolian soldiers was broken up; thousands of mounted soldiers collapsed back to the sides as though the tides swept them. Guo Jing galloped ahead with a long spear in his hands. The Han behind him formed a tight formation and they surged forward. They managed to get to the city gates. Guo Jing turned his steed

around and went to defend the back of the group. His long spear knocked seven or eight Mongolian Generals off their steeds. The Mongolian soldiers stopped pressing for the time being.

Lu Wende relied on Guo Jing heavily and when he saw him escape danger he was ecstatic; he quickly called out, "Open the gates! But only a little, don't open the gates too wide!"

The city gates opened three or four feet and just allowed one rider in at a time. All the men returned to the city. The yellow flag of the Mongolian army was waved and two divisions of soldiers on horseback charged forward from both sides.

Lu Wende called out, "Brother Guo Jing, quickly get back into the city! We can't wait for the others."

How could Guo Jing enter the city while he still had men outside? He turned his horse back and killed two Mongolian soldiers that had ridden up to him.

But once the army was in motion, they moved like the waves of the sea. Guo Jing was skilled in martial arts, but how could one person defend against the attack of a large army?

Zhu Ziliu saw the situation was urgent and quickly lowered down a rope. He called out, "Brother Guo, grab it."

Guo Jing turned his head and saw the final Beggar Clan member had entered the city but he was followed by ten Mongolian soldiers. The guards at the gates fought them off and began closing the city gates. The two foot thick metal gate slowly closed. Guo Jing shouted and killed an Arban Chief with his spear before leaping up to take the rope. Zhu Ziliu pulled up with all his strength and Guo Jing rose up ten feet.

The Noyan who was supervising the troops ordered, "Arrows!" Immediately, a thousand bows released their arrows. Guo

Jing was prepared for this. He tore off the lower part of his gown and swung it in front of his body with his left hand like a shield while he kept hold of the rope with his right hand. The gown was unyielding and blocked off all the arrows; but the steed that he had left behind outside the city walls was killed by the raining arrows. Zhu Ziliu pulled with both hands and pulled Guo Jing up higher and higher.

Guo Jing was around twenty feet away from the top of the city wall when a tall skinny monk appeared amongst the Mongolian army. He was wearing a yellow Buddhist gown; it was none other than Jinlun Fawang. He took a bow from one of the Mongolian soldiers and raised it. He knew that Guo Jing and Zhu Ziliu's martial arts were high and would be able to avoid any arrows he shot at them so instead he aimed for the rope. It was a vicious move. The arrow was ten feet away from both Guo Jing and Zhu Ziliu; the two had no way to stop this arrow. Jinlun Fawang was afraid that the two might come up with a way to stop this arrow so he fired two more arrows, one at Guo Jing and the other at Zhu Ziliu. The first arrow severed the rope while the second and third arrow headed for Guo Jing and Zhu Ziliu with great force.

When the rope severed, Guo Jing dropped and the arrow aimed at him missed. Zhu Ziliu felt the weight in his hand lessen and called out; "Oh no!" The arrow had arrived. It was a very forceful arrow; the person who fired it must have very profound internal energy. The top of the city walls were filled with people, if Zhu Ziliu lowered his head to avoid this arrow, someone behind might be injured. So he stretched out the second finger on his left hand and touched the stem of the arrow, diverting it back down the city wall.

Guo Jing was slightly alarmed when he felt the rope part; though he won't be injured by the fall, he would be surrounded by thousands and thousands of soldiers. How could he fight his way out of that? The Mongol army is right

next to the city gate now; if my side opens it to let me in, the Mongols would definitely take the opportunity to push through. There was no time to think in this danger; his left foot flicked up against the wall and he flew up over ten feet. His right foot followed and he rose up another ten feet. Very few people were proficient in this “Stairs to Heaven” technique. Even those who were well versed in it could only manage two or three feet per step; but on this slippery wall, each step of Guo Jing’s took him over ten feet. Guo Jing’s martial arts were frighteningly good. Silence broke out on the battlefield as everyone fixed their eyes on him.

Jinlun Fawang was slightly startled when he saw this. However, he knew that when one uses the “Stairs to Heaven”, they must make their leap in one breath. If Fawang could distract him and disturb his breathing then Guo Jing would not be able to make his third step, so Fawang raised his bow again and shot an arrow towards Guo Jing’s back.

The arrow flew like the wind. Shouts of, “No arrows!” were heard from soldiers from both the top of the city walls and down below. Both sides saw the terrifyingly good skills of Guo Jing and were in awe; they all hoped that he would make it. The Mongolians were the enemy but had much respect for great heroes and great men, they were all furious when they saw someone had fired an arrow at Guo Jing.

Guo Jing knew that the arrow behind him had a tremendous force behind it. He called out in alarm, “Not now!” He had to use his hand to deflect it away. Both sides cheered when they saw that the arrow failed to hit him. But with this earth shattering noise, Guo Jing was falling back down the city wall. There were only a few feet to the top of the city wall but Guo Jing had no way to climb up it.

When the two sides were fighting, the same was happening within Yang Guo’s heart. In the short space of time that Guo

Jing climbed up, dropped down, climbed up and dropped down again, Yang Guo's mind repeatedly went over, "He killed my father, should I kill him or not, or should I save him or not?"

When Guo Jing was using the "Stairs to Heaven" technique, Yang Guo had thought about throwing out a palm at Guo Jing. Guo Jing was in midair and had nothing to support himself with; he would definitely suffer a serious injury and fall back down from the city wall.

But as he was hesitating, Fawang had already fired an arrow at Guo Jing that stopped him from coming up. Yang Guo's mind was in confusion. Suddenly, he grabbed the severed rope in Zhu Ziliu's hand with his left hand and leapt down from the city wall towards Guo Jing, grabbing Guo Jing's arm with his right hand.

This was a move out of the blue but Zhu Ziliu responded with great speed. He first lowered the rope down slightly before gathering strength into his arms and urgently pulled the rope upwards. Yang Guo and Guo Jing arced in circle like two large birds flying in the sky. The soldiers on both sides watched with their mouths open.

When Guo Jing was in midair he thought, wouldn't it mean he had lost in this exchange if he doesn't reply to this sneak attack by this evil monk? He saw Fawang had fired another arrow. As soon as his left foot touched the top of the city wall he immediately grabbed a bow from one of the guards and fired an arrow of his own towards Fawang's arrow. The arrows collided in midair and Fawang's arrow was split into two. Fawang was stunned. Suddenly, a fierce gust arrived; a 'zheng' sound was heard as the metal bow in his hands snapped in two.

Though Guo Jing's and Fawang's martial arts were within a hairsbreadth of each other, Guo Jing's archery skills were

unsurpassed. He had learned archery from one of the greatest Mongolian archers, Zhe Bie (Jebbeh), when he was young and his internal energy was profound – when it came to archery, Fawang lost out.

Guo Jing had fired three arrows; the first divided Fawang's arrow, the second snapped Fawang's bow and the third was fired towards Khubilai's flag staff.

Khubilai's flag had fluttered in the wind gloriously amongst the thousands of soldiers, but now it had fallen. Soldiers from both sides shouted and hollered.

Khubilai saw his army's morale drop after Guo Jing's display and immediately ordered his men back.

Guo Jing stood at the top of the city wall and watched the Mongolians retreat. They were marching back in formation and in line; those who were at the front didn't rush and those who were at the back showed no fear. He couldn't stop himself from sighing and thinking, "Our weak Song army cannot compete with the great Mongolian army." He frowned as he worried about the fate of his nation.

Zhu Ziliu, Yang Guo and the others were in awe of Guo Jing when they saw that he had no signs of pride of his face even after displaying his might in front of thousands.

Khubilai pulled his men back tens of miles and then started to think of a plan to take the city. With Guo Jing at the helm, it would be difficult to take it.

Fawang said, "Your highness saw for yourself; if it weren't for Yang Guo, Guo Jing would be dead now. I knew that Yang Guo was not a man of his word."

Khubilai said, "No! I think it's because he wants to Guo Jing to die by his own hands and not at the hands of others. He

appears to be a brave and valiant man; he is not a conniving fellow.”

Fawang didn't agree but he didn't dare to answer back, he just said, “Hopefully your highness is correct.”

Xiangyang city was safe now that the Mongolian army had pulled back. Lu Wende was delighted and threw another banquet to celebrate it. This time, Yang Guo was also invited.

Everyone praised him for his swift and life risking actions in saving Guo Jing. The Wu brothers sat at another table and were filled with jealousy. Yang Guo had made a great achievement immediately after arriving at Xiangyang. They were also afraid that after this event, Guo Jing would again insist on betrothing his daughter to Yang Guo. The brothers didn't say a word and just sat there, drinking wine.

Everyone returned to the Guo residence when the banquet finished. Huang Rong invited Yang Guo into the inner halls and praised him. Yang Guo replied with modest words.

Guo Jing said, “Guo'er, you've just exerted a fierce force, does your chest hurt?” Guo Jing was worried that by using unrestrained force, Yang Guo's internal injury would flare up.

Yang Guo was worried that Huang Rong would ask about this further and see through this so he quickly replied, “I'm fine... I'm fine.” He changed the subject immediately and said, “Uncle Guo, the kung fu that you used to fly up the city wall was excellent, there isn't another who can match that in the world of Wulin.”

Guo Jing gave a little smile and said, “I learned this kung fu a long time ago and haven't practiced it for years; I'm a little rusty with it and that was why I ran into a bit of trouble.” In actual fact, if he hadn't used his chi and internal energy to help Yang Guo protect his 'dan tian' last night, he would have

been able to fly up the city wall using the “Stairs to Heaven” technique even with Jinlun Fawang’s interference. Naturally, he didn’t mention this and said, “Years ago in Mongolia, the Red Sun Elder Ma taught me this skill; who would have thought that I would have to use it today. If you like this skill I’ll teach it to you in a few days time.”

Huang Rong saw that Yang Guo seemed absent minded and his thoughts were somewhere else. His rescue of Guo Jing was seen by thousands, there was nothing suspicious about this but she still felt uncomfortable and said, “Brother Jing, I’m not feeling well tonight, stay with me.”

Guo Jing nodded and said to Yang Guo, “Guo’er, you’re tired, go and rest.”

Yang Guo said his goodnights to the two and went back to his room alone. He heard the call for the second hour. He sat in front of the table and stared at the flickering candlelight with many thoughts running through his head. Suddenly, a noise came from the door. A girl’s voice said, “You’re not sleeping?” It was Xiao Longnu. Yang Guo leapt up in delight and opened the door. Xiao Longnu was standing in front of him dressed in a light green gown.

Yang Guo asked, “Gu Gu what’s the matter?”

Xiao Longnu said, “I wanted to see you.”

Yang Guo held her hand and said tenderly, “I was just thinking about you.”

The two of them strolled out to the garden. The scent of the flowers and trees filled the air. Xiao Longnu looked at the semi-circled moon in the sky and said, “Do you have to kill him with your own hands? We haven’t got much time left.”

Yang Guo quickly whispered into her ear, “The walls have ears here, don’t talk about it.”

Xiao Longnu looked at him enraptured and said, "When the moon is full, the time will be up."

Yang Guo was alarmed and counted with his fingers; it had been nine days since they parted from Qiu Qianchi. If he doesn't kill Guo Jing within the next two days, there will not be enough time to hurry back to the valley before the poison reacts. He let out a sigh and sat down on a taihu stone (limestone rocks found in Lake Tai) with Xiao Longnu. The two looked at each other without saying a word and they became wrapped up in their love, forgetting all about matters of killing and avenging.

Suddenly, the sounds of footsteps could be heard from behind the garden fountain, two people were approaching.

A girl's voice said, "If you're going to keep nagging me then you might as well just get a sword and slit my throat to stop my torment."

An angry male voice said, "Huh, don't you think I don't know that you've got more than one man in your heart? That Yang punk showed off in front of everyone after arriving in Xiangyang. Do you remember what you said before?" It was Guo Fu and Wu Xiuwen.

Xiao Longnu made a face at Yang Guo, trying to scold him for flirting with girls everywhere and tormenting them. Yang Guo gave her a smile and pulled her closer to him. He shook his head lightly, telling her not to make a noise.

When Guo Fu heard these words, she became furious and raised her voice, "Since you've made your mind up then forget everything I said before. I'll go somewhere far away by myself; I'm not going to see Yang Guo and I'm not going to see you." A tearing sound was heard; Wu Xiuwen must have tugged her sleeve and Guo Fu must have pulled it back.

Her voice became even angrier as she said, "What are you doing? So what if he shows off? What's it got to do with me? If my parents betroth me to him I'd rather die than agree to it. If father forces me then I'll run away. That Yang Guo has always been an attention grabber since he was young, but I choose not to give a damn about him. Father thinks he's some kind of treasure whereas I think that he's not a good person."

Wu Xiuwen said quickly, "Yes...Yes. I was stupid just now, please forgive me sister Fu. If I act like that again, then I won't have a good death and when I reincarnate, I'll reincarnate as the king of cowards." Feelings of joy seeped through as he said this. Guo Fu giggled.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu looked at each other and smiled; one was thinking, "Look, look at how others view me." The other thought, "I was wrong just now, I love you but others love someone else."

Though Guo Fu had a scolding tone in her voice and treated Wu Xiuwen almost like a child, making him obedient and completely enchanted. She had tender feelings for him.

Wu Xiuwen then said, "Master wife loves you very much; beg her day and night non-stop. If Master wife agrees not to betroth you to the one named Yang, then master will not be able to say anything."

Guo Fu said, "Huh, what do you know? Father may listen to mother but when it comes to important matters, mother will not stand up to father."

Wu Xiuwen gave a sigh and said, "It'll be great if you treat me the same." Suddenly, a 'pa' sound was heard and Wu Xiuwen called out in pain. He said quickly, "Why are you hitting me"

Guo Fu said, "Who told you to say things like that? I'm not going to marry Yang Guo, and I'm not going to marry you, you little monkey."

Wu Xiuwen said, "Fine, fine. Finally you've admitted it. You don't want to be my wife but you want to be my sister in law. Let me tell you something... let me tell you something..." He was flustered and couldn't finish his sentence.

Guo Fu's voice suddenly became gentle and tender as she said, "Little brother Wu, you've told me a thousand times, a million times how you feel about me, I already know. Though your brother hasn't even said one word of this kind, I know that he loves me. No matter who I pick, one of you brothers will be broken hearted. Don't you know how hard it is for me?"

Wu Dunru and Wu Xiuwen had always relied on each other ever since they were young because they lost the care of their parents; but in the last few years, the two of them had fallen madly in love with Guo Fu and both were troubled by the other. Wu Xiuwen's heart was filled with angst and tears actually fell from his eyes.

Guo Fu took out a handkerchief and gave it to him. She sighed, "Little brother Wu, we all grew up together, I have great respect for your brother but I find it easier to talk to you. I am not biased towards any of you. You're trying to force me to make a clear choice now, if you were me, what should I say?"

Wu Xiuwen said, "I don't know. All I know is if you marry someone else, life would not be worth living."

Guo Fu said, "Let's stop talking about this. Father fought for his life against the enemy today while we're talking about some trivial stuff here in the garden; if father finds out about this then we'll both be in trouble. Little brother Wu, let me

tell you, if you want to please my parents then why don't you try to stand out, achieve some great deeds in battle? Won't my parents look down on you if you keep on hanging around me?"

Wu Xiuwen leapt up and said loudly, "You're right, I'll go and assassinate Khubilai and rid the threat to Xiangyang. When that happens, will you agree to marry me?"

Guo Fu smiled, "If you can do such a thing then I would have no other choice but to marry you, wouldn't I? But Khubilai has many guards around him. Even my father may not be able to beat that Jinlun Fawang. Stop dreaming, just go and sleep."

Wu Xiuwen stared at Guo Fu's elegant face and said, "Fine, you go and sleep as well." He turned around and walked away a few steps before suddenly stopping. He turned and asked, "Sister Fu, are you going to have a dream tonight?"

Guo Fu laughed, "How do I know?"

Wu Xiuwen said, "If you do dream, what do you think you will dream about?"

Guo Fu gave a little laugh and said, "Most probably about a little monkey."

Wu Xiuwen was filled with joy and skipped away.

Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo listened to their words behind the flower thicket. They couldn't stop themselves from grinning at each other and comparing themselves with them: one was madly in love with the other while the other didn't have a set mind; while they had only each other in mind and could die without regret. That couple's joy and happiness could not compare with the joy and happiness of themselves.

After Wu Xiuwen left, Guo Fu sat on the stone bench and looked up at the moon in deep thought. She stared at it for a long while before letting out a sigh.

Suddenly, someone came out from behind the garden fountain and said, "Sister Fu, why are you sighing?" It was Wu Dunru.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were both slightly startled. Wu Dunru must have hid himself here a long time ago, he was here even before they in fact, otherwise the two would have noticed him when he arrived here.

Guo Fu said with a slight angry tone, "You are always weird like this. You heard everything we said, right?"

Wu Dunru nodded and stood opposite of Guo Fu at quite a distance away but his eyes were still filled with love. The two looked at each other in silence.

After a while, Guo Fu said, "What do you want to say to me?"

Wu Dunru said, "Nothing. You know what I have to say." He turned around and then slowly walked away.

Guo Fu stared at his back while he walked away towards the garden fountain. He didn't turn around even once. She thought, "Wouldn't it be great if only one of them existed?" She gave a deep sigh and returned to her room alone.

Yang Guo waited until she had gone before laughing, "If you were her, who would you marry?"

Xiao Longnu turned her head slightly and thought for a while before saying; "You."

Yang Guo laughed, "I don't count. Miss Guo does not like me one bit. I said if you were her, which one of the Wu brothers would you pick?"

Xiao Longnu compared the two Wu brothers in her mind but still came up with, "I'll still marry you."

Yang Guo was amused and touched. He embraced her and said tenderly, "Others have more than one in their hearts but my Gu Gu loves me only."

The two of them stayed in each others loving arms until daylight.

The sun was on the eastern horizon. The two still did not want to part. Suddenly, a servant rushed up to them and greeted them before saying, "Master Guo requests Master Yang's presence immediately,"

Yang Guo saw that his face was anxious and knew that it was something important. He left Xiao Longnu and followed the servant to the inner halls.

The servant said, "I searched for master Yang everywhere; master Yang was appreciating the scenery in the garden."

Yang Guo said, "Has Master Guo been waiting a long time?"

The servant whispered, "The two masters Wu's suddenly disappeared, Master and Madam Guo are worrying about them and Miss Guo cried a few times!"

Yang Guo was startled when he heard this but he knew what had happened. "The two Wu brothers are trying to fight for the hand of their apprentice sister and want to do something outstanding; they must have gone to assassinate Khubilai. He hurried inside and saw Huang Rong looking distressed in her nightgown with Guo Jing pacing to and fro. Guo Fu's eyes were red and it looked like she was going to cry at any time. There were two swords on the table.

As soon as Guo Jing saw Yang Guo he quickly asked, "Guo'er, the Wu brothers went to the Mongolian camp, do you know

why?”

Yang Guo glanced over at Guo Fu and said, “The Wu brothers went to the Mongolian camp?”

Guo Jing said, “Yes. You young ones always talk to each other, do you have any clue about why they went?”

Yang Guo said, “I didn’t notice anything. The two Wu brothers did not say anything to me. It’s probably because they were worried about the danger that Xiangyang was in so they went to the camp to kill a few senior generals. It’ll be a great achievement if they succeed.”

Guo Jing sighed and pointed to the swords on the table. He said, “Even if their hearts are in the right place, they don’t know what they are getting into; their weapons have been taken away and sent back here.”

Yang Guo was rather surprised by this. He knew that the Wu brothers would not be able to succeed with such great fighters such as Jinlun Fawang, Yin Kexi, Xiaoxiang Zi and the likes around; but he wouldn’t have predicted that it would happen in the past few hours and that their weapons would be sent back.

Guo Jing gave the letter that was on top of the weapons to Yang Guo and glanced at Huang Rong. The two of them shook their heads. Yang Guo opened the letter and saw:

To Hero Guo of Xiangyang from the First Protector of Mongolia
Jinlun Fawang,

Last night when I was hunting, I unexpectedly came upon your disciples by the name of Wu. People say that great Masters will produce great disciples; I cannot deny this. I have long admired and marveled at Hero Guo’s great name. Last time we meet at the heroes’ feast, we did not get the chance to make acquaintances. I have written to you to

invite you to the camp so we may do so and share wine. As soon as you arrive, your disciples will be returned safely. Will you accept this invitation?

The letter had a humble tone and it appeared to be an ordinary invitation for Guo Jing to go to the camp and make acquaintances with Fawang. But what the letter really was saying is that the Wu brothers will only be released if Guo Jing agrees to go to the camp.

Guo Jing waited for Yang Guo to finish reading before saying; "Well?"

Yang Guo knew what this was about, "Auntie Guo's wisdom is ten times greater than mine, Auntie Guo would have come up with any plan that I could think of. The reason she summoned me to discuss this matter is for one reason only; she wants me and Gu Gu to accompany Uncle Guo to the Mongolian camp. Fawang, Xiaoxiang Zi and the others together might beat Uncle Guo but it isn't guaranteed that they'll be able to kill and capture him. If Gu Gu and I help him, Uncle Guo will be able to escape." He then immediately came up with, "But if Gu Gu and I suddenly changed sides, to harm him will be as easy as turning my palm. If I can't kill him with my own hands, then I'll just let Fawang and the others to do it for me, wouldn't that be great?" He then gave a wry smile and said, "Uncle Guo, my Master and I will go with you. Auntie Guo has seen our swordplay defeat Jinlun Fawang; they might not be able to keep us there if the three of us go together."

Guo Jing was delighted and smiled, "No one can compare with your intelligence apart from your Auntie Guo. This is the exact thing that your Auntie Guo came up with."

Yang Guo thought, "Huang Rong, oh Huang Rong, you've been clever all your life but today you lose out to me." He said, "We'll go right now. Gu Gu and I will pretend to be your

attendants, that way we will be able to emphasize your heroic manner in coming to this meeting all by yourself.”

Guo Jing said, “Good!” He turned to Huang Rong and said, “Rong’er, you don’t need to worry, with Guo’er and Miss Long, even if it was a dragon’s lagoon or a tiger’s lair, we’ll still be able to return safely.”

He straightened his gown and said, “We’ll get Miss Long.”

Huang Rong shook her head and said, “No, I just wanted Guo’er to go with you. Miss Long is like a porcelain doll, I cannot let her meet any danger. I want her to stay with me.”

Yang Guo was startled but then immediately understood, “Auntie Guo is indeed wary of me. She wants to keep Gu Gu with her as a hostage, that way I won’t be able to do anything. If I insist of having Gu Gu with me, she will be even more suspicious.” He didn’t say anything about it.

But Guo Jing said, “Miss Long’s swordplay is excellent, it would be a great help if she comes with us.”

Huang Rong countered, “Your Polu or Xiang’er are about to be born. If Miss Long is here to guard me, I can relax a bit more.”

Guo Jing said quickly, “Yes, yes, I’m so dumb. Guo’er, let’s go.”

Yang Guo said, “Allow me to tell my Gu Gu.”

Huang Rong said, “I’ll tell her in a minute, you two are just going to the camp for half a day, it’s not some great event.”

When it came to using their minds, Yang Guo found himself losing out to Huang Rong every time. So he decided to use his against the honest and sincere Guo Jing instead. He’ll make his move against him in the camp and then come back

to save Xiao Longnu afterwards. He made his mind up and left the city with Guo Jing.

Guo Jing rode the precious red horse and Yang Guo rode his skinny yellow horse. The two horses were fast and they arrived at the camp within one hour.

Khubilai was startled and delighted that Guo Jing had actually decided to come here and he quickly invited him into his tent.

Guo Jing entered the tent and saw a middle-aged Prince sitting in the middle of the tent. He had a square face and large ears with deep-set eyes; Guo Jing was stunned when he saw this and thought, "This person looks so much like his father Tuo Lei." He was very close to Tuo Lei [Tolui] when he was younger but now he had passed away; his eyes turned red at this thought and he almost cried.

Khubilai left his seat to greet him and bowed down to him, saying, "When my father was alive, he always praised the heroic and righteous Uncle Guo. I have always admired Uncle Guo. To have the opportunity to meet you is the fulfillment of my lifelong dream."

Guo Jing bowed to him and said, "Tuo Lei and I were like brothers; when I was younger, my mother and I lived in Genghis Khan's territory and it was your father who looked after us. It is very sad that he died suddenly at such a young age."

Khubilai heard that his words were sincere and they moved him. He then introduced Xiaoxiang Zi, Yin Kexi and the others to him and then invited him to his place.

Yang Guo stood behind Guo Jing and pretended that he didn't know any of them. Fawang and the others did not

know why he came but when they saw him ignoring them, they ignored him.

However, Ma Guangzuo called out, "Brother Ya..." Before he finished saying 'brother Yang', Yin Kexi had pinched his leg tightly. Ma Guangzuo called out, "What are you doing?"

Yin Kexi turned his head around and ignored him. Ma Guangzuo didn't know who did this and kept on shouting out insults. He forgot about greeting Yang Guo.

Yang Guo sat down and drank some Mongolian milk wine. Yang Guo saw that the Wu brothers were not present and was about to ask their whereabouts when Khubilai ordered his attendants; "Invite the Masters Wu in." The attendant did as he was told and pushed Wu Dunru and Wu Xiuwen into the tent.

Their hands and legs were tied tightly with cowhide. The restraints between their legs were just a foot long so the two couldn't take their normal strides. They could only struggle slowly forwards. Their faces were filled with embarrassment when they saw their Master. They called out, "Master!" and then lowered their heads in silence.

Guo Jing had been extremely angry with them for taking such a risk without telling anyone and causing this mess, but when he saw the two, his feelings changed. Their clothes were torn and blood stained and they were tied up so pathetically, his anger turned to pity. He thought that although the two were reckless, their hearts were in the right place by trying to help the nation, so he said warmly, "A martial artist will endure countless sufferings and countless defeats, what you've suffered is nothing."

Khubilai pretended to scold his attendants and said, "I ordered you to look after these two Masters Wu with great care, why have you treated them like this? Quickly untie

them.” The attendants followed his orders. However, the cowhide was soaked in water after being tied and had shrunk tightly into the skin, the attendants couldn’t untie it.

Guo Jing left his seat and took the ends of Wu Dunru’s restraints. He pulled outwards lightly and the restraints snapped. He then did the same with Wu Xiuwen’s restraints. Guo Jing’s movements looked plain, ordinary and seemed to lack sufficient force, but by succeeding, he showed he possessed great internal energy. Xiaoxiang Zi, Yin Kexi, Nimoxing and the others looked at each startled, and all secretly praised his martial arts.

Khubilai said, “Bring some wine quickly so you can apologize to the two Masters Wu.”

Guo Jing thought, “Today’s not going to be plain sailing; something’s going to happen soon. If the Wus don’t leave now, I’m going to be distracted.” He then made a bow to everyone in the tent and said clearly, “Thank you your Highness for teaching my disciples a lesson for their insolence.” He then turned to the Wu brothers and said, “Go back and tell your Master wife that I’m going to stay here for a while and talk with an old friend’s son, I’ll be back soon.”

Wu Xiuwen said, “Master, you...” Last night they failed in their assassination attempt and were captured by Xiaoxiang Zi. He knew that the camp was filled with great fighters and he couldn’t stop himself from worrying about Guo Jing.

Guo Jing waved his hand and said, “Leave now! Go and tell General Lu to guard the city tightly and no matter what happens, do not open the city gates in case of an attack by the enemy.” Guo Jing said this with a mighty aura and was telling Khubilai that even if something happens to him, Xiangyang will not surrender.

When the Wu brothers saw that Guo Jing had come personally to save them, they were touched but also ashamed of themselves. They didn't say anything else and made their goodbyes with Guo Jing before returning to the city.

Khubilai laughed, "Uncle Guo must not have known about your disciples coming here to assassinate me."

Guo Jing nodded and said, "I did not know about this. My disciples don't know how tall the sky is and how deep the earth is, they were extremely impudent."

Khubilai said, "Yes, Uncle Guo and my family have deep ties with each other, the thought of assassinating me would never cross Uncle Guo's mind."

Guo Jing said with a serious expression, "You're wrong here. The matters of the people are more important than my own. Years ago when Tuo Lei led an army here to attack Xiangyang, I once thought about trying to kill him to force the army to retreat. But at that exact time, Genghis Khan fell ill and the army retreated and so our brotherhood was preserved. There's a saying, 'place righteousness above family loyalty', since a family can be gotten rid of, why not friends?"

These words were said with a righteous air and Fawang, Yin Kexi and the others all looked at each other with changed faces.

Yang Guo's chest trembled and he thought, "Yes, killing brothers is his best skill. I wonder what my father did all those years ago to eventually die by his hands. Guo Jing, oh Guo Jing, could it be that you've never made a mistake in your entire life?" As he thought about this, hate and fury slowly filled his chest.

Khubilai did not show any signs of anger and had a smile on his face as he said, "So why does Uncle Guo reproach your disciples when you have the same view?"

Guo Jing said, "Looking at their lowly abilities, what chance had they of succeeding in this task? Their failure is not important, it's just that once they failed, you will be even more wary of someone assassinating you; this task would be made even more difficult for later assassins."

Khubilai laughed and thought, "I've heard that Guo Jing is an honest and simple person who's not very good with words, who knew that he can actually speak with such spirit and gusto."

Actually, Guo Jing was just saying what was on his mind and because he knew what he wanted to convey; he was able to say it with great sincerity.

When Fawang and the others saw that he came alone and empty handed to this vast army without any signs of fear on his face; they were in complete awe of him since none of them could match the spirit that he was displaying.

Khubilai couldn't stop himself from admiring Guo Jing. When he saw Guo Jing's lofty air and thought that if he could convince him to join his command, it would be better than taking down ten Xiangyang cities. So he said, "Uncle Guo, the Song are in disarray. You have an Emperor who is blind to the people's plight, you have scoundrels in your courts and those who are loyal are punished, am I right?"

Guo Jing said, "Correct, Emperor Li Zhonghuang is a blind man and the Prime Minister Jia Sidao is the biggest crook of them all." No one guessed that he would actually insult his own emperor and leaders. Everyone was startled.

Khubilai said, "Yes. Uncle Guo is a great man and a hero of our time so why do you work for such men?"

Guo Jing stood up and said clearly, "Even if the one named Guo is unworthy, why would I allow myself to let those people use me? When I see you violent Mongols invading our land and killing my people, my blood boils. I'm doing this for my people; the angry blood that flows through me is because of them."

Khubilai patted on the arms of his chair and said, "What great words. Everyone, give a toast to Uncle Guo." He raised his bowl and downed the wine in one go.

Everyone was getting anxious and they were all afraid that with these stirring words and his relationship with Khubilai's father, Khubilai might actually let him go. It would be extremely difficult to capture him again but no one could do anything. When they saw Khubilai raise his bowl, they did the same and drank it down in one go. The attendants filled their bowls once more.

Khubilai said, "I once heard an old man say, 'It's the people of the land that are important, not the Khan.' What a truthful phrase. The land of Mongolia is in a state of peace; my people live happily and have what they need. My Khan could not bear to see the people of the Song suffer and when he saw that no one was doing anything about it, he sent his troops south to help end the troubles of the people. This thought is the same as Uncle Guo's, we both have the same heroic view. Come, let's toast again."

Fawang and the others all raised their bowls to their lips. Guo Jing swept his sleeve and sent a gust of wind over. There was a bout of 'qiang lang lang' noises as everyone's bowls fell to pieces on the floor.

Guo Jing angrily shouted, "Stop! Ever since you Mongols invaded our land, you have killed and slaughtered; corpses and bones mount up while blood flows like rivers. My citizens have lost their homes and countless have died by your army's sabers and arrows. What troubles of my people are you ridding them of?"

Though this sweep of the sleeve was extremely sudden and was completely unexpected, it still managed to knock the bowls out of the hands of Fawang and the others who possessed great martial arts. Everyone felt shame and they all stood up, waiting for Khubilai's orders to attack.

But Khubilai gave a long laugh to the sky and said, "The Generals of the Mongolian army say that Uncle Guo is a hero without a match, everyone is full of admiration for Uncle Guo. Indeed after seeing you with my own eyes, I now know that your great name is not a myth. I do not dare harm the brotherly relationship of my father; because of the past let's stop talking about matters of the country?"

Guo Jing saluted with his hands and said, "Tuo Lie's son is a magnanimous and open-minded man, and none of the other Mongolian princes can compare with him. He will no doubt lead the country one day. I have some advice for you, would you like to listen?"

Khubilai said, "I am willing to listen to Uncle Guo's teachings."

Guo Jing folded his arms and said, "The land of the Southern Song is vast and the people many. Talented and learned men are everywhere, and since history began, these kinds of men have not submitted to anyone. You Mongols might be able to expand your territory for a little while but in the future, you will be forced back north. When that happens, it will be disastrous for you and to regret it then will be too late. Please reconsider what you are doing."

Khubilai smiled, "Thank you for your words."

Guo Jing heard him say these words casually and said, "We'll say our goodbyes at that. Goodbye."

Khubilai waved his hand and said, "Escort the guests out."

Fawang and the others looked at each other startled and all thought, "It wasn't easy to catch him, how can we let the tiger escape back into the mountains?" When they saw Khubilai sending Guo Jing out politely, they all felt that it was inappropriate to make a move on him.

Guo Jing strode out of the tent and thought, "This Khubilai is no ordinary person; he is indeed a strong foe." He signaled with his eyes towards Yang Guo, telling him to hurry towards their steeds.

Suddenly, eight Mongols dashed forward from the sides. The leading Mongol said, "You're Guo Jing? You injured many of my brothers at Xiangyang and you've actually dared to come here to our camp to show off your might again. His highness has allowed you to go but we cannot allow it." With a shout all eight men dashed forward towards Guo Jing. These eight men all used Mongolian wrestling techniques as sixteen hands went to grab Guo Jing.

Mongolians are unmatched in wrestling and these eight men were first-rate fighters in the Mongolian army. Khubilai had hid them nearby to capture Guo Jing. But Guo Jing grew up in Mongolia and was well versed in riding, archery and wrestling; when he saw the eight pair of arms coming towards him he stretched out his hands and swept his right leg. In a flash, he had flung four men over ten feet away and tripped the other four onto the ground. He used orthodox Mongolian wrestling techniques but because he had advanced martial arts as a base, the strength in his arms and

legs was stronger than any normal men. How could the eight men defend against this?

Khubilai had stationed his personal Minghan unit outside the tent and each one of them was skilled in wrestling. They saw how fast and clean Guo Jing's movements were in throwing down eight men to the ground in one go. They had never seen such a display and they all cheered.

Guo Jing held out his fist towards the crowd and took off his hat, spinning it in his hand. This was the routine that one did to the crowd after winning a wrestling match. The crowd cheered even louder when they saw him do this. The eight men picked themselves up from the ground and looked at Guo Jing in shock. They didn't know whether to go again or just leave it at that.

Guo Jing said to Yang Guo, "Let's go!"

Suddenly, a horn could be heard and Minghan regiments from everywhere galloped towards them. Khubilai had moved his troops and surrounded Guo Jing and Yang Guo.

Guo Jing was slightly shocked and thought, "Even if we had the greatest of skills, how could we break out of this? Who would have thought that Khubilai had gone to such lengths to get me captured?" He was afraid that Yang Guo would get worried so he kept a normal expression and said, "Our steeds are fast horses. Our main priority is to break out of this encirclement. We need to get two shields to protect ourselves from their archers." He then whispered into his ear, "First gallop south and then go north."

Yang Guo was shocked, "Xiangyang is south of here, why go north?" But he immediately understood, "Hmm, yes, Khubilai must have placed his men around Xiangyang in case he went south. The north will be free of soldiers. First go south and

then go north unexpectedly; they will not be able to respond in time and we can escape. How should I stop him?"

Yang Guo was trying to make his mind up when he saw a few people dart out of the tent. These people had blocked their path. A 'ming ming' sound followed as a bronze and iron wheel flew towards the steeds; it was Fawang.

Guo Jing saw that the wheels were coming in with great force and did not dare to use his hands to catch them. He lowered his head and pressed down on the necks of the two horses with his hands; the horses lowered their front legs just in time for the iron and bronze wheel to brush over their heads. The two wheels turned in midair and flew back into Fawang's hands. This slight delay allowed Nimoxing and Yin Kexi to arrive in front of Guo Jing and Yang Guo. Fawang and Xiaoxiang Zi arrived a little later and the four surrounded them.

Jinlun Fawang, Xiaoxiang Zi and the others were all first rate fighters and normally would not lower themselves to fight in numbers, but Guo Jing was too strong and they were all thinking about the title of 'The Greatest Warrior of Mongolia'. White and golden light glimmered as all of them took out a weapon.

Fawang was holding a bronze and iron wheel. Yin Kexi was holding a golden jewel embedded whip. Xiaoxiang Zi was holding a short Ku Sang Rod. The person holding the strangest weapon was Nimoxing. In his hand was a short iron Snake whip that looked like a live snake as it was moved on his arm.

From their running movements and their hand movements in taking out their weapons, Guo Jing could see that the weakest out of the four appeared to be Yin Kexi. He immediately threw both his palms forwards towards Xiaoxiang Zi. Xiaoxiang Zi extended his rod forward, aiming

for Guo Jing's palm. Guo Jing looked at his weapon and saw white silk twirling around it and there was hemp at one end. Guo Jing saw that Xiaoxiang Zi's martial arts were high and his weapon strange, he'll definitely have some strong points about him, so he turned his right arm around and used a stance of "Divine Dragon Sweeping its Tail", he immediately grabbed Yin Kexi's golden whip. Yin Kexi wanted to use his whip to attack his opponent but it had already been grabbed. He followed the opponent's pull and threw his body forward with a glittering dagger in his left hand. This stance was using an attack as a defense and it was the top skill of the "Eighteen Little Grabbing Hand Technique".

Guo Jing called out; "Good!" He used his grabbing hand technique on him again. His right hand still held onto the whip as he went for his dagger. Guo Jing's arms were crossed over as his right hand held onto the whip in Yin Kexi's right hand and his left hand held onto Yin Kexi's left hand. Yin Kexi was sure that by thrusting his dagger forward, his opponent would have no choice but to let go of his whip and avoid the dagger. Who would have thought that his dagger would also be held?

At this time, Fawang's wheels and Xiaoxiang Zi's short rod attacked. Guo Jing did not manage to snatch away the golden dragon whip with his first pull and he shouted out; a surge of great chi went through the whip into Yin Kexi. Yin Kexi felt as if a metal hammer had struck his chest heavily, his eyes saw stars and he threw up a mouthful of blood. Guo Jing let go of the whip and blocked the attacks. Yin Kexi knew that he had suffered a severe injury and he pulled back slowly. He sat down on the ground and circulated his chi through his 'dan tian' and held back the urge to vomit more blood.

Fawang, Xiaoxiang Zi and Nimoxing were both delighted and afraid when they saw Guo Jing injure Yin Kexi with his first

attack. They were delighted because there was now one less competitor for the title of the 'Greatest Warrior of Mongolia', but they were also afraid because they saw how powerful Guo Jing was. They themselves might suffer the same fate if they weren't careful. The three of them did not dare make any rash moves and defended themselves.

Guo Jing responded to every stance that came to him and studied the strange weapons of Nimoxing and Xiaoxiang Zi carefully. The Ku Sang rod was made out of pure iron and apart from being heavy and sturdy; he couldn't see anything special about it. Nimoxing's snake shaped weapon was very strange, the head of the weapon was like the head of a poisonous snake and the body of the weapon was soft and crooked. Both the head and tail of the snake shaped weapon were sharp but the most powerful aspect of the weapon was that it was hard to predict the weapon's movements. One couldn't tell when the body of the snake would bend over, the head and tail of the weapon had no certain direction; the iron snake whip would suddenly leap up and whirl around in Nimoxing's arms and then suddenly curl up and slither around, the weapon had hundreds of variations.

In his younger years, Guo Jing had seen the stances of Ouyang Feng's snake staff; the staff was like a real snake and it had venomous poison with it. Even if Nimoxing's weapon was extremely powerful, it was still a dead object. When he attacks and when he takes the snake back, there will be certain principles behind it that can be seen through. Because of this, the only person that Guo Jing was worried about was Jinlun Fawang.

The four of them had exchanged several moves when suddenly someone shouted and stepped forward, a man mountain appeared; it was Ma Guangzuo. He was holding a thick and long bronze rod in his hand and smashed it down towards Guo Jing's head from behind Nimoxing. The four of

them were in a heated battle and all of them defended tightly, there was not an ounce of spare space in between any of them. The exchange from Guo Jing's palms, Jinlun Fawang's wheels, Xiaoxiang Zi's short rod and Nimoxing's iron snake had formed a net of force around them. By smashing the rod down, Ma Guangzuo was running up against the force created by the four. Ma Guangzuo's rod suddenly bounced back up as it met this invisible force. He noticed something was wrong and shouted out as he gathered strength into his arms to keep control of the rod. Even though he managed to do this, the joints in his hands bled. He called out loudly, "Evil, evil!" He increased the strength in his arms and smashed down once more.

Fawang was standing in front of him and he saw what was happening, the greater the force he smashes down with, the more he'll suffer and Fawang just chuckled.

Yang Guo watched from the side and knew what would happen; though Ma Guangzuo was strong, his martial arts could no way compare with that of Guo Jing. If he makes a fierce attack blindly and meets up with the world's most yang and unyielding "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palm" of Guo Jing head on, what chance would he have of living? Even if he doesn't die under the palm of Guo Jing, he would be seriously injured by the weapons of Fawang, Nimoxing and Xiaoxiang Zi. He liked this dim-witted person for his simple and straightforward character and for standing up for him on many occasions. If Ma Guangzuo strikes down he would definitely meet great danger so Yang Guo called out, "Ma Guangzuo, watch out for my sword!"

The gentlemen sword went for his back.

Ma Guangzuo was stunned and stopped his bronze rod in midair. He said with shock, "Brother Yang, why are you fighting me?"

Yang Guo insulted, "You Dumbass, what do you think you're doing? Get away!" The long sword quivered as several stances were thrust forward. Ma Guangzuo could do nothing but retreat. Yang Guo pierced forward furiously and forced him back step by step. Ma Guangzuo had long legs and every step of his was the equivalent of two ordinary steps by a normal person. Ten steps later and they became quite a distance away from Guo Jing and the others.

The sword glimmered in front of his eyes. He could never have dreamed that Yang Guo would suddenly try to kill him and even if he used every ounce of strength he had, he would not be able to fend off these attacks by Yang Guo.

Yang Guo waited until he had retreated back a few more steps before quietly saying, "Brother Ma, do you know that I've just saved your life?"

Ma Guangzuo said loudly, "What?"

Yang Guo said quietly, "Keep your voice down, don't let the others hear."

Ma Guangzuo said with his eyes wide open, "Why? I'm not afraid of that Guo Jing." These words were still said clearly and loudly. To him, he was speaking at a normal tone but to others his voice was like someone was shouting and hollering.

Yang Guo said, "Okay don't speak, just listen to me." Ma Guangzuo listened to him and nodded. Yang Guo said, "That Guo Jing knows witchcraft. All he has to do is to recite a curse and he's able to chop someone's head off. It's better if you run away as far as possible."

Ma Guangzuo's eyes opened wider when he heard this and believed his words though he had doubts.

Yang Guo wanted to save his life and he knew if he said that Guo Jing's martial arts were too high, he would never admit defeat; but if he said that Guo Jing knew witchcraft, this slow witted person would probably be scared. He continued, "You tried to smash his head in with your rod but before you even touched his head, the rod bounced back up, isn't that strange? That merchant's martial arts are excellent but how come as soon as he went up to fight him, he was injured?" Ma Guangzuo was becoming slightly more convinced and nodded his head but looked over at Fawang and the others.

Yang Guo knew what he was thinking and said, "That monk knows how to write charms. He gave one to that zombie and one to that dwarf, if you have one on your body, you will be protected against witchcraft. Did that monk give you one?"

Ma Guangzuo said angrily, "No."

Yang Guo said, "Yes, that old baldy didn't give me a charm as well. We'll sort him out afterwards."

Ma Guangzuo said loudly, "You're right. What should we do?"

Yang Guo said, "We'll watch from the side, the further away the better."

Ma Guangzuo said, "Brother Yang, you're a great friend. It was lucky you told me about this." He put away his weapon and watched the battle from afar.

Guo Jing was using the great Wulin skill the "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms". Fawang and the others kept tight on him thinking that even if his internal energy was more profound, he would not be able to keep up so powerful a palm technique for much longer. But Guo Jing had been practicing the "Nine Yin Manual" diligently for the last twenty years; at first his real power did not show but tens of stances later, the "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms" suddenly

became powerful and then suddenly gentle, from great hardness came softness. This was something that Hong Qigong did not manage to grasp all those years ago. By using this kind of palm technique to fend off these three fighters, not only did he remain on an even level with them, he was able to counterattack when he had the chance and he was getting more and more fluent as he went on.

Yang Guo watched in awe from the side. He too had practiced the “Nine Yin Manual” in the ancient tomb; but because he had no one to instruct him, he didn’t know that the manual’s arts were this extraordinary. He followed Guo Jing’s palm techniques with the teachings of the manual in mind and immediately he understood countless profound fist theories. His mind concentrated on this and for the time being, he forgot about killing Guo Jing to avenge his father.

Fawang’s martial arts and Guo Jing’s martial arts were separated by the smallest of margins; Guo Jing may have had more fortunate encounters than Fawang but Fawang was twenty years older than he and had twenty years worth of internal energy more than Guo Jing. If the two fought one on one, they would have to exchange over a thousand stances to decide who was better. With first-rate fighters such as Nimoxing and Xiaoxiang Zi by his side, it shouldn’t have been difficult to gain victory over Guo Jing. But Guo Jing’s “Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms” were too powerful and along with his palm technique, he was using Quanzhen’s “Big Dipper Formation”. He went to and fro as he fought and it was as if he had separated into seven. Another reason why he was still holding them off was because of his immediate victory over Yin Kexi; this was a warning to the others and the remaining three made defense their main priority and did not dare to make a rash attack. Although it was three against one, Guo Jing still held his own against them.

After a few more stances, the power in Fawang's wheel gradually increased. The force of the attacks from Nimoxing's iron snake was increasing as well.

Guo Jing was getting anxious and thought, "If this continues, I won't be able to hold them off. Guo'er is over fighting with that giant. That giant's martial arts are just average, Guo'er will be able to manage. I need to get over to him as soon as possible and think of a way to get out of this place." The four were putting all their concentration into their battle and did not dare to even blink; they did not notice Yang Guo and Ma Guangzuo were just watching their battle.

Suddenly a strange whistling noise was heard. Xiaoxiang Zi leapt up several feet into the air and pointed his Ku Sang rod downwards. Guo Jing stepped to the side to avoid it when suddenly everything went dark; a black smoke was being emitted from the Ku Sang rod. A stench filled Guo Jing's nose and he felt slightly faint. He called in alarm to himself and knew that there was something poisonous within the Ku Sang rod and he quickly moved backwards.

Xiaoxiang Zi had seen Guo Jing had definitely taken in the black smoke but he did not faint. He was extremely shocked and thought, "Lions, tigers and any kind of wild beast would faint as soon as they come across my toad poison. But it doesn't seem to have any kind of effect on him; that is strange." He leapt up once again and shot out some more poison from his rod.

Years ago when Xiaoxiang Zi was practicing martial arts in the wild mountains of Hunan, he saw a toad that was hiding itself in a broken coffin. It had poisoned a large python to death. He understood what the toad had done and gathered some toads to extract the venom from them. He developed a poisonous dust and secreted it in the Ku Sang rod. There was a lever at the end of the rod. When his finger pressed down

on the lever it would shoot the poison out. The higher above he fires the poison from, the more effective it becomes. He has used this poisonous dust on pythons and wild beasts before and it knocked them out immediately; but he could not have guessed that Guo Jing's internal energy was so profound that he was actually able to suppress the effects of the poison.

Fawang and Nimoxing were to the side of Guo Jing and although they did not come in direct contact with the dust, they had smelled a little and they immediately had the urge to vomit. They quickly leapt away from it. Xiaoxiang Zi had plugged the antidote to this poison in his nose beforehand and he dashed forwards into the black smoke, waving out his rod to attack.

Guo Jing used a stance of "Seeing the Dragon in the Field" and sent it towards Xiaoxiang Zi's kneecaps. Xiaoxiang Zi used his rod to block the attack and before he had any more time to fire some more poison out, he had been forced back five feet by the palm.

Guo Jing slanted his body to the side only to see Nimoxing coming in with an attack with his iron snake. He sent out a stance of "The Forbidden Submerged Dragon". Nimoxing quickly placed the Iron Snake across his chest and held each end with his hands. However, the power of this palm of Guo Jing's came from the area around the palm and not in the palm itself. Though the palm was going for Nimoxing's chest, there was no kind of force going towards it and he blocked thin air. By the time he knew something was wrong, his abdomen and his face had felt the power of the palm. Luckily for him, he was very short and as a result was very nimble, he quickly threw himself down and rolled away on the ground like a ball.

Guo Jing saw his chance to escape and called out, "Guo'er, let's go!" He leapt out into the open plains. Fawang flew after him. Guo Jing's back was just a few feet away from the Mongolian soldiers and immediately over ten spears were pointed towards it. Guo Jing used his arms to parry away the spears and then grabbed and threw two soldiers towards Fawang. He called out, "Catch!"

If Fawang caught them, it would slow him down and give Guo Jing the chance to run further away so he slanted his left shoulder and knocked into the soldiers and sent them flying over ten feet away. He threw his golden wheel towards Guo Jing's back.

Guo Jing knew if he returned just one stance, he would get caught up in a fight with Fawang. When Nimoxing and Xiaoxiang Zi catch up, it would be difficult to escape again, so he grabbed two spears and thrust them backwards. He did not slow down one bit as he did this and it was as if he had a third eye on his back; one of the spears went towards Fawang's right shoulder and the other for Fawang's chest. Both the direction and power behind it was complete. Fawang secretly praised this and then swept his golden wheel across, smashing the spears in two. By the time his sights were back on Guo Jing, he had already darted into the Mongolian army.

This division of soldiers was ordered by Khubilai to station themselves deeply around the tent to capture Guo Jing. But when Guo Jing darted into their formation, the soldiers could do nothing about him; they could not capture him nor harm him. Sounds of spears and sabers could be heard along with calls and shouts. These soldiers actually hindered Fawang and the others in their chase after Guo Jing.

Guo Jing hiding himself amongst the soldiers and horses was like hiding himself in a dense forest; it was actually easier for

him to escape danger like this than in the open land. He ran up to a Noyan and pulled him down from his horse. He leaped on the horse and galloped left and right amongst the crowd of soldiers. Soon he managed to break through the rear of them and he galloped forward, whistling as he went. The red horse was left at a faraway place and when it heard its master summoning it; it galloped like the wind towards him.

Yang Guo watched from afar as the red horse galloped towards Guo Jing. He thought to himself, "Oh no!" He knew that once Guo Jing got on the red steed, Khubilai would have no way to catch up with Guo Jing even if he sent all the world's men after him.

In this urgent situation, he suddenly called out, "Oh no, I'm feel as if I'm dying!" He wobbled a bit as if he was about to fall down onto the ground. He then whispered to Ma Guangzuo, "Don't say anything, run away now! The further away the better." He had circulated his chi through his 'dan tian' when he called out and even in this clamor, Guo Jing would definitely be able to hear it. When Guo Jing heard this, he would definitely come back for him, but if he sees Ma Guangzuo with him, Guo Jing might actually throw out a palm and send Ma Guangzuo to his death. Ma Guangzuo was very obedient to Yang Guo's words and although he didn't understand what he meant by this, he ran away towards the royal tent.

When Guo Jing heard Yang Guo's call, he was indeed worried. He didn't wait for the red horse and turned his horse back towards him. He went back into the swarm of soldiers and galloped towards where Yang Guo was standing.

A thought went through Fawang's mind and he knew what Yang Guo was trying to do. He allowed him to pass and instead blocked his escape route.

Guo Jing rode up to Yang Guo and said anxiously, "Guo'er what's wrong!"

Yang Guo swayed a little and said, "That giant is not a match for me but for some reason, whenever I try to use any real strength, a surge of chi runs through me and my 'dan tian' feels as if it's being cut up by knives."

This was a completely believable lie; Guo Jing could tell that Ma Guangzuo's martial arts were very ordinary when he attempted to smash down on him with his rod, so if Yang Guo said it was Ma Guangzuo who injured him, Guo Jing would be suspicious. But if he said that something's wrong with his chi, Guo Jing would not be able to tell if he was lying or not from the outside. There was also the fact that Guo Jing mistook Yang Guo for fire deviating the previous night. The likelihood of this type of injury recurring again in the heat of battle is not uncommon.

Guo Jing saw that he was holding his abdomen with his left hand and his head was covered in sweat. It appeared that the injury was not light and he said quickly, "Get on my back; I'll carry you out of here."

Yang Guo said with a false pretence, "Uncle Guo, quickly go, my life isn't worth anything but Xiangyang's fate depends on you. The country, the army, the people, and all their hopes rest on you."

Guo Jing said, "You came here because of me; how can I leave you here? Quickly get on."

Yang Guo dallied as Guo Jing lowered himself. Guo Jing pulled him onto his back. Just at this time, the horse that Guo Jing had snatched was killed by the Mongolian soldiers' arrows.

Guo Jing had experienced countless dangerous situations in his life; the more dangerous the situation the greater his

bravery. He pondered on how to get out of this situation and he said to Yang Guo, "Guo'er, don't be afraid, we are going to fight our way out of here." He stood up and dashed north.

Fawang, Nimoxing and Xiaoxiang Zi were now attacking Guo Jing once again. Guo Jing looked around and saw that soldiers surrounded them; this situation was even direr than the previous time that they were surrounded.

Beneath the camp's banner stood Khubilai. He was holding a bowl of wine and was watching the battle with a monk by his side. There was an arrogant expression on his face as he watched on with victory assured.

Guo Jing gave a shout as he carried Yang Guo towards Khubilai. He arrived in front of Khubilai after just three leaps. Khubilai's bodyguards were alarmed and they pointed their spears at Guo Jing. Guo Jing's palms overcame all obstacles as it sent one of the guards flying away. Just a few more feet forwards and Khubilai would be in range of Guo Jing's palm. All Khubilai's guards defended him with their lives but how could they stop Guo Jing?

Fawang saw it was getting desperate and he threw his golden wheel towards Guo Jing's head. Guo Jing lowered his head to avoid the wheel but did not stop and continued forward.

Yang Guo thought, "If he holds Khubilai hostage, the Mongolians will have no choice but to let him go. If I don't make my move now, when am I going to make it?" He hesitated a little and eventually said, "Uncle Guo was my father really a tyrant that left you with no choice but to kill him?"

Guo Jing was stunned with this question but he had no time to give it much thought in his reply in their present situation and immediately replied, "He took a scoundrel as his father,

he betrayed his country and plotted against his people, he deserved to die.”

Yang Guo said, “Fine!” He hesitated no longer and raised his gentlemen sword and thrust it towards Guo Jing’s back.

Suddenly, a white blur appeared and a rod swept across and blocked his sword. Yang Guo followed the rod and dispersed the opponent’s force. He looked carefully and found out that it was Xiaoxiang Zi who had stopped his sword. He was surprised and thought, “My sword was just about to go through Guo Jing, why are you stopping me?” But he immediately understood his reasons, “That’s right; if I kill Guo Jing then the title of ‘Mongolia’s Greatest Warrior’ will be mine. Huh, this zombie doesn’t know that I’m just trying to avenge my father; I don’t care about titles and whatnot.” He unleashed several stances and forced Xiaoxiang Zi’s rod away. He turned his sword back towards Guo Jing and thrust it towards him once again. Xiaoxiang Zi used his rod and blocked his sword.

At this moment, Guo Jing was fending off Fawang’s wheel and Nimoxing’s Iron Snake with his palms; he didn’t know what Yang Guo was up to. He just thought that Yang Guo was trying to fight Xiaoxiang Zi with all his might and he said, “Be careful of the poison in his rod.”

Fawang and Nimoxing were in front of Guo Jing and could see what was going on clearly and both shouted, “Xiaoxiang Zi, what are you doing?”

Xiaoxiang Zi cackled and suddenly swept his rod towards Guo Jing. Guo Jing moved out of the way. Yang Guo was about to send his sword through Guo Jing for the third time but once again, Xiaoxiang Zi blocked his sword.

Guo Jing was worried about Yang Guo’s injury and was afraid that he would not be able to cope with Xiaoxiang Zi’s rod so

he sent out his left palm towards Xiaoxiang Zi's chest. Xiaoxiang Zi quickly jumped out of the way.

Yang Guo had no one to stop him now and he sent out his sword towards Guo Jing's back. However, Xiaoxiang Zi was worried that Yang Guo would succeed and he advanced immediately after his retreat and sent his rod towards the vital pressure points on Yang Guo's back, forcing Yang Guo to save himself first.

Guo Jing was using his right palm to compete advanced internal energies with Fawang. Both he and Yang Guo were in great danger. He ignored his own safety and tried to save Yang Guo first. His left palm used a stance of "Divine Dragon Swinging its Tail" and collided with Xiaoxiang Zi's short rod. Xiaoxiang Zi's arm burned and his ghastly white face turned red.

But at that exact time, Nimoxing had rolled towards him and extended his Iron Snake towards Guo Jing's left side. Guo Jing was using seventy percent of his energy against Fawang and the remaining thirty percent in blocking Xiaoxiang Zi's rod. He had nothing left to block this attack of Nimoxing and could only move his left side back half a foot. He was able to avoid the iron snake's main attack but the head of the iron snake still managed to embed itself inches into his side.

Guo Jing circulated his chi and his muscles flexed and stopped the head of the iron snake from going in any further. He immediately followed this by a flying left kick and sent Nimoxing tumbling. Nimoxing saw that his iron snake had struck one of his vital areas and thought that the title of the 'Mongolia's Greatest Warrior' would be now be his. But he would never have dreamed that his enemy would have such incredible martial arts that would allow him to grasp victory from the jaws of defeat. This kick landed on Nimoxing's chest and broke three of his ribs.

Xiaoxiang Zi and Nimoxing had both been defeated but Fawang took this opportunity to gain victory and quickly increased the strength in his palm. Guo Jing's chi on his left side has now been disturbed and he could hold on no longer. He felt a mountain shattering and ocean turning force coming towards him. If he continued to take this head on, the result would be death. He could only disperse the power in his palm and rely on his twenty years worth of internal energy to take this stance. His body swayed continuously and he threw up a mouthful of blood. His life was in danger but his thoughts were still on Yang Guo. He called out, "Guo'er, go and get a horse, I'll hold them off."

After seeing Guo Jing protect him with his life, Yang Guo's emotions were stirred and he no longer cared about his revenge. He thought about how righteous and virtuous his Uncle Guo was, if he didn't repay a life with a life then he will have wasted his life on earth. He leapt off his back and flurried his 'Gentleman' sword to protect Guo Jing. He was like a mad tiger and fought with his life with every stance.

Fawang and Xiaoxiang Zi were stunned and shouted, "Yang Guo, what are you doing?"

Yang Guo did not reply and sent out a stance towards Fawang. The tip quivered and another stance was sent out towards Xiaoxiang Zi. The two saw that his eyes were red and that he had a strange expression on his face; they both took two steps back. They assumed that he wanted to kill Guo Jing himself in order to get the title of the 'Greatest Warrior of Mongolia'.

Guo Jing said, "Guo'er, don't worry about me, save yourself."

Yang Guo replied, "Uncle Guo, it's my fault that you've ended up like this. I'm going to die with you." The sword glimmered as he ignored his own safety and protected Guo Jing.

Fawang and Xiaoxiang Zi raised their weapons and attacked Guo Jing together. But Yang Guo's sword stances were extremely lively and he actually kept the two at bay. The Mongolian army surrounded them and roared as they watched the three fights. Guo Jing kept on urging Yang Guo to run away but all he saw was Yang Guo protecting him with his life. He was worried but also touched. His internal injury flared up and he could hold on no longer; his knees went limp and he fell to the ground.

Nimoxing held down the pain of his broken ribs and advanced forward slowly with his iron snake to kill Guo Jing. Yang Guo sent out several wild stances and then put Guo Jing on his back. He dashed north. His martial arts could not compare with Fawang normally but now with Guo Jing on his back, how long could he last? Several exchanges later, his left arm was slashed open by Fawang's golden wheel.

End of Chapter 21.

Chapter 22 - The Baby Girl of the City in Danger

Translated by Noodles



The golden wheel was shot low to the ground. As it got closer and closer, Yang Guo had no other option but to use his sword to repel the wheel. He knew that he had no strength left and knew that it was nigh on impossible for him to succeed but he had no choice but to give it his all. The wheel was now just two feet away from the horse with the wheel generating a soul shaking noise.

Just as Guo Jing and Yang Guo thought they had ran out of luck, the Mongolian soldiers and horses suddenly started to disperse. An old crippled man with a metal crutch in his left hand and a hammer in his right advanced towards them. He called out, "Master Yang, escape quickly, I'll hold them off."

Yang Guo took a glance at him and recognized it was one of Peach Blossom Island's disciples Feng Mofeng. He was extremely surprised by this event, but in this perilous danger, he didn't give it much thought as to how he suddenly appeared.

When Feng Mofeng was forced into working for the Mongolian army, he used the chance to assassinate members of the Mongolian army and had already killed a Noyan and a Jagen leader. He was very careful in making his moves and was yet to be discovered. Today, he heard a great commotion and so he headed up to a high vantage point to see what was happening. He saw that Guo Jing and Yang Guo were surrounded, so he fought his way in to help them. His iron hammer caused gusts of wind as it was swung and those who met it died instantly. A bloody trail was left in his wake.

Yang Guo was delighted with this development and swung his sword to try to break out. However, Fawang used his wheel to intercept Yang Guo's and Feng Mofeng's stances at the same time. Whenever Xiaoxiang Zi's rod came down towards Guo Jing's back, Fawang would allow Yang Guo to

save Guo Jing. If Fawang used his wheel to smash down on Guo Jing, Xiaoxiang Zi would block his attack with his rod. If it wasn't for the two fighting each other, and even if Yang Guo gave his life in trying to protect Guo Jing, Guo Jing would have been dead long ago.

When Khubilai came up with the reward of being 'Mongolia's Greatest Warrior', he had hoped that his men would use all their efforts to achieve this goal; but instead they fought with each other, which was something that he did not predict.

Guo Jing's life might be safe for the time being, but the Mongolian army had positioned themselves all around him like an iron wall, presenting a metal boundary. Fawang and Xiaoxiang Zi were fighting for first place. Nimoxing bit down on his tongue as he held in his pain and looked for a chance to attack, attacking with vicious stances here and there.

By now, Yang Guo and Guo Jing had been battling within the army for over an hour. The sun was now skewed to the side. Fawang suddenly changed his stances and his wheel collided with Yang Guo's long sword. The 'Gentleman Sword' was a blade that can cut through metal like butter; as soon as the weapons collided, a hole was made in the golden wheel. Fawang followed the momentum and kept on going forward. The wheel caused an extremely strong pressing wind over them. Yang Guo was afraid that if he moved out of the way, Guo Jing would be injured so he used his sword to take this attack head on. The wheel slanted slightly and a light 'chi' sound was heard; Yang Guo's right forearm was slashed open. Though the wound wasn't deep, it had cut a vein and blood rushed out. As he fought, he felt his legs going limp and was running out of breath; under these attacks, how could he stop defending in order to stop his bleeding?

Feng Mofeng swung his metal hammer viciously and used every ounce of strength in his efforts to help Yang Guo and Guo Jing. But Fawang's left palm blocked and attacked, reducing Feng Mofeng to a state where he could only defend. If Feng Mofeng hadn't fought for his life, he wouldn't have even been able to save himself.

Xiaoxiang Zi saw his chance had come; he first sent Nimoxing's iron snake to the side and then leapt up into the air. He pointed his rod towards Guo Jing and was about to release the poisonous dust.

Yang Guo was shocked by this and quickly stretched out his left hand to take the rod. At the same time, he sent his sword forward. At that time, his body was completely open; all Fawang had to do was strike him lightly with his golden wheel and he would have been sent to his death. But Fawang wanted to use Yang Guo to send Xiaoxiang Zi away. Fawang forced Feng Mofeng away with his palm and sent out his arm to grab Guo Jing's back. Capturing him alive would be a great achievement. Xiaoxiang Zi did not predict that Yang Guo would actually risk his life to stop him. Before he came back to ground his rod had been grabbed and he couldn't exert any force while in midair. A white light flashed across his eyes as the sword arrived at his chest. He could do nothing but let go of his rod and move out of the way to save his life.

Feng Mofeng smashed forwards with both his hammer and crutch at Fawang's back. Two 'dang dang' sounds were heard as Fawang used his wheel to repel the attack. Feng Mofeng's joints bled from the force. Fawang's left hand went out for Guo Jing's back. Feng Mofeng gave a howl and abandoned his weapons and grabbed Fawang's back. The two fell down onto the ground. Fawang was furious and struck his shoulder with a palm. Feng Mofeng felt as if his insides were turned upside down. Feng Mofeng saw how cruel and vicious the Mongolians were from the camp and saw how they used his

citizens in their attack on Xiangyang. He also saw how Guo Jing fought with his life to drive the enemy away. He didn't know Guo Jing personally and had no idea that Guo Jing was his Master's son-in-law; he just knew that if this person dies, Xiangyang would fall. So he made up his mind; he was going to endure anything in order to get Guo Jing out of danger. Fawang's palms came out with unspeakable speed. Feng Mofeng's bones were broken and his innards severely damaged but still, Feng Mofeng did not let go and dug deep into Fawang with his ten fingers.

The Mongolian soldiers had decided to watch from the side because they thought that Fawang would definitely be able to handle the situation. But when they saw him fall down to the ground, they all rushed forward. In such a situation, even if Guo Jing was perfectly healthy and if his and Yang Guo's martial arts were even better, how could they fight off the rush of hundreds of soldiers?

Yang Guo sighed to himself, "It's over...it's over!" He swung out Xiaoxiang Zi's rod wildly when suddenly there was a light 'po' sound; black dust spurted out from the end of the rod. The ten soldiers that were directly in front of the smoke fell down immediately. In his wild movements, Yang Guo had accidentally triggered the release of the poisonous dust. Yang Guo was slightly startled but immediately understood. He carried Guo Jing and made his way forward; whenever Mongolian soldiers came to meet him, he would trigger the poison and send more men to the ground with the poison.

Though the Mongolian soldiers were great in battle, they were all superstitious. When they saw how their own men suddenly fell down dead to the ground as soon as black smoke came from the rod, they shouted, "His rod is covered by an evil spell, everyone back!"

Khubilai's personal guards were extremely brave and regarded his orders above all else; even though they saw how dangerous it was for them, they still went forward to catch Yang Guo and Guo Jing. Yang Guo sent out some more poisonous dust and immediately sent another ten or so men to their deaths.

Yang Guo whistled and summoned his horse. His yellow horse stretched its legs and flew towards him. Yang Guo used every last ounce of his strength to place Guo Jing on the horse's back but felt his limbs were all drained of energy. He had no strength left to get onto the horse. He could only strike the horse's back lightly and call out, "Quick, leave quickly!" However, the yellow horse was very loyal to its master; when it saw that Yang Guo had no strength to get on, it raised its head and neighed. Yang Guo saw that the Mongolian soldiers were closing in on him; though the poison in the rod was lethal, there's a limit to the amount of poison it holds. He raised his sword wanting to jab his horse to force it to leave, but in the end he couldn't bear to. He called out, "Leave!" He poked the horse with the end of the rod. Because his strength had been drained in battle, his poke wasn't accurate and actually struck Guo Jing. Guo Jing had been unconscious but with this sudden poke, he opened his eyes. He immediately picked up Yang Guo and helped him onto the horse. The yellow horse gave out a joyous neigh and galloped away.

However, the sounds of horns followed closely behind them. Guo Jing gave a whistle and his red horse galloped towards him. The Mongolian army was right behind them. The red horse galloped to the yellow horse's side and kept nuzzling Guo Jing. Yang Guo knew that although his yellow horse was a fine animal, it was still inferior to the red horse. He drew a deep breath and with Guo Jing in his arms, leaped on the red horse. Just at this time, he heard a 'ming ming' sound; Fawang's golden wheel was flying towards them. Yang Guo's

heart ached as he thought, “Feng Mofeng has died at Fawang’s hands.”

His thoughts stilled as the wheel came closer and closer. Yang Guo lowered himself to the horse’s back and hoped the wheel would brush past him. But the wheel sounded from below; it was actually aiming for the horse’s legs.

After Fawang had killed Feng Mofeng, he stood up and saw that Yang Guo and Guo Jing had already gotten onto their horses; it was too late to chase after them. He immediately shot out his golden wheel low to the ground. Fawang knew that if the wheel struck Yang Guo and kills him, the red horse would still escape with Guo Jing. Only by cutting off the horse’s legs would he have a chance to succeed in his task.

As the wheel got closer and closer, Yang Guo had no other option but to use his sword to repel the wheel. He knew that he had no strength left and knew that it was nigh on impossible for him to succeed but he had no choice but to give it his all. The wheel was now just two feet away from the horse with the wheel generating a soul shaking noise. He hung his sword down to protect the horse’s legs but who would have thought that as soon as the horse realized it’s life was in danger, it galloped faster and faster. The wheel remained two feet away from the horse. Yang Guo was delighted as he knew that the wheel would only get slower and slower. Indeed, a little while later the distance between the wheel and the horse’s legs increased to three feet, to four feet, to five feet; the gap was getting larger and larger. Eventually a ‘dong’ sound was heard as the wheel landed on the ground.

Yang Guo was filled with delight, but then he heard a pitiful neigh behind him. He turned around and saw his yellow horse, its stomach filled with arrows, still staring lovingly at its master. Yang Guo’s heart was filled with sadness and tears

fell from his eyes. The red horse galloped like the wind and traveled like a shooting star. In just a short while, it had left the pursuing army behind.

Yang Guo held Guo Jing and asked, "Uncle Guo, are you okay?" Guo Jing let out a moan. Yang Guo checked his breathing and felt that it was still deep and strong; he knew that he was okay. He was now able to relax and he could hold on no longer. He fell into a semiconscious state on the back of the horse and let it go wherever it pleased.

Suddenly, countless numbers of soldiers and horses appeared in front of him. He immediately swung his sword and called out, "Don't harm my Uncle Guo!" He cut and slashed wildly around him. He couldn't see clearly as faces appeared here and there. After a bout of slashing around wildly, he eventually fell off the horse. But he was still calling out, "Kill me, kill me, it was my fault, don't harm my Uncle Guo." Suddenly, he felt as if the world was spinning around him and he eventually fell unconscious.

Some time passed before he woke up again. He called out, "Uncle Guo, Uncle Guo; are you okay? Don't harm my Uncle Guo!"

A tender voice by his side said, "Guo'er, relax, Uncle Guo will be okay after some rest."

Yang Guo turned his head and saw Huang Rong with an extremely grateful expression. Behind her was someone with tears in her eyes, someone staring at him tenderly and lovingly; it was Xiao Longnu.

Yang Guo called out in alarm, "Gu Gu, why are you here? Have you been captured as well? Quick, run away; just leave me."

Xiao Longnu said, "Guo'er, you're back, don't be afraid. We're all safely back in Xiangyang."

Yang Guo let out a relieved sigh. His limbs felt lifeless and he closed his eyes again.

Huang Rong said, "He's awake now, he'll be fine. You stay here with him."

Xiao Longnu agreed but her eyes never left Yang Guo. Huang Rong stood up and was about to leave the room when suddenly a noise came from the rooftops. Her expression changed slightly and with a wave of her left palm, she distinguished the light in the room.

When Yang Guo saw the room plunging into darkness, he sat up in alarm. His injuries were just superficial; the reason he had fainted was due to losing a lot of blood and from over exerting himself in the heated battles. He had rested for half a day now and Huang Rong had fed him the Peach Blossom Island's great medicine the Nine Flowers Jade Dew Pill. With him being young and in great shape, he had almost recovered completely by now. When he heard that someone was on the rooftop, he immediately became alert and was about to get up to face this enemy. Xiao Longnu blocked his way and unsheathed the 'Gentleman Sword' that was beside the bed. She whispered, "Guo'er, don't move, I'll guard here."

A laugh came from the rooftop followed by, "I have come to deliver a letter, is it the custom for the Song to greet their guests in the dark? If you are busy, might I come back later?" It was Fawang's disciple, Huo Dou.

Huang Rong said, "It is the custom of us Song to meet esteemed guests in broad daylight; we meet those who sneak about under the cover of darkness with darkness."

Huo Dou's voice choked up and he lightly leapt down to the courtyard. He said, "I have a letter for Guo Jing, Hero Guo."

Huang Rong opened the door and said, "Please enter."

Huo Dou did not dare to enter the pitch-black room and stood outside the door. He said, "The letter is here, please take it."

Huang Rong said, "You described yourself as a guest so why don't you enter?"

Huo Dou chuckled, "A gentleman in a dangerous place should prepare for the worst."

Huang Rong said, "What kind of gentleman views others with the mind of a scoundrel?"

Huo Dou's face flushed. Dealing with someone with such expertise with words as Chief Huang, it would be difficult for him to gain any sort of upper hand so he decided it would be better to keep quiet. He stood outside the door in silence with the letter held out in his hand.

Huang Rong struck out suddenly with her bamboo rod and attacked Huo Dou's front. Huo Dou, startled by this sudden move, leapt back a few feet, but something was wrong; his hands were empty. Huang Rong had placed the end of her rod on the letter and trapped it with her rod while Huo Dou was jumping back. She was soon to give birth and didn't want to see any outsiders. This is why she kept away from her enemy. After that shock, Huo Dou became despondent; the confidence he had gained from entering the city had all but disappeared. He shouted loudly, "I have delivered the letter; we will meet again tomorrow night."

Huang Rong thought, "If I let you come and go as you please from the city, how will that make us look?" She picked up a teapot from the table and shook it to the side; a spout of hot tea shot outwards.

Huo Dou had been on his guard for projectiles shot at him. But the water from the teapot came out without any kind of noise; it wasn't like your typical projectile that cuts the air with a sound. By the time he found out something was wrong, his neck, chest and right arm was covered with the tea. He felt a hot tingling sensation and called out 'ai ya' in shock while leaping aside. Huang Rong stood by the door and while Huo Dou's feet were still unsteady, she stuck out her bamboo rod and used the "Dog Beating Stick Technique's" 'trip' formulae. She flicked the stick up and sent Huo Dou to the ground. Huo Dou leapt up but the rod strokes of this particular 'trip' formulae has each stroke faster than the last. If you are able to dodge the first stroke, you might then be able to think of a way to evade the next. Huo Dou had already been sent to the ground with the first stroke, how easy was it going to be for him to avoid the next? He felt as if his feet had stepped into a pool of slippery mud; he also seemed to have found himself caught in between countless numbers of tree branches and found he was tripping up as soon as he picked himself up from the ground.

Huo Dou's martial arts were by no means weak; if he fought Huang Rong fair and square he would eventually find himself to be a level lower than Huang Rong. Were his martial arts higher he wouldn't have been tripped up so pathetically as this just after one stance. The reason he was in such a state was because he thought that the tea that landed on him was some kind of lethal poison. Just as he was fearfully thinking about what kind of horrible death the poison would bring him, Huang Rong suddenly attacked. Once the first attack succeeded, there was no way to defend against the second and in the pitch-blackness, he was tripped up until he was black and blue. Just at this moment, the Wu brothers arrived after hearing all the commotion.

Huang Rong shouted, "Capture that little bastard!"

In his moment of danger, Huo Dou became alert. He knew that if he picked himself up again he would definitely be sent down to the ground again so he called 'ai ya' and pretended to have a serious fall. He lay on the ground and didn't make a move. The Wu brothers threw themselves forward to capture him. Huo Dou's metal fan suddenly came out and then 'da da'; he had sealed the pressure point on their legs. He pushed the two forward at the same time to block Huang Rong's rod stances and leapt up to the top of the wall. He made a bow with his hands and said, "Chief Huang, terrific rod techniques, but it's a shame about your disciples!"

Huang Rong chuckled, "With that poison on your body, who in their right mind would come and touch you?"

As soon as Huo Dou heard this, he was scared witless, "This poison burns the skin and carries the scent of tea with it; what kind of weird powerful poison is this?"

Huang Rong knew what he was thinking and said, "You've been poisoned yet you don't even know what the name of the poison is. I guess if you die, you won't die in peace. Fine, there's no harm in telling you. This poison is called 'The Tea of Bones from Midnight to Noon'."

Huo Dou mumbled, "The Tea of Bones from Midnight to Noon?"

Huang Rong said, "Correct. If even one drop of this poison lands on your skin, your whole body will dissolve away to your bones. From midnight you won't see noon, from noon you won't see midnight. You've still got about twelve hours to live; you better make the most of it."

Huo Dou knew that this Chief Huang has great martial arts and possesses an unfathomable mind. Her father Huang Yaoshi is a greatly educated man and with the name Yao Shi (translates as master of medicine), he of course must be

especially skilled in medicine. With Huang Rong's intelligence and her family's skills, to make a poison such as 'The Tea of Bones from Midnight to Noon' would be easier than turning one's palm. He stood on top of the wall in a daze, not knowing whether to go back and wait for his death or to lower his head and beg her for the antidote.

Huang Rong knew that Huo Dou was not an idiot, if a little time passes he will see through this little deception so she said, "I had no feuds with you to begin off with, if it wasn't for your little act of disrespect towards me just now, I wouldn't have condemned you to your death."

When Huo Dou heard these words he knew he had a chance to live. He abandoned his pride and leapt down from the wall. He bowed to the ground and said, "I have been disrespectful to Chief Huang, I ask her for her forgiveness."

Huang Rong hid behind the door and with a light flick of a finger; she shot out a Nine Flowers Jade Dew Pill. She said, "Take it quickly."

Huo Dou caught it and didn't waste anytime in taking this life saving pill. He felt a clear essence entering his dan tian and noticed an extremely relaxing feeling throughout his body. He made another bow and said, "Thank you Chief Huang for the antidote!" By now, all his arrogance had disappeared and he retreated slowly to the wall before flipping over and making a swift exit out of the city.

Huang Rong watched him leave and then went over to the Wu brothers and unsealed their pressure points. She then recalled Huo Dou's words; 'Chief Huang, terrific rod techniques but it's a shame about your disciples!' Though she managed to get rid of Huo Dou with her intelligence, she felt no pride. She may have used the exquisite and deft "Dog Beating Stick Technique" to trip Huo Dou up but her womb still acted up. She sat down on a chair and rested for a while.

Xiao Longnu lit the candles. Huang Rong opened the letter to see:

To Hero Guo from the First Protector of Mongolia Jinlun Fawang;

To be able to meet and admire Hero Guo was a great honour. I had hoped to converse through the night but our meeting was cut short. What did I do to make you leave in such a hurried manner? I will come and visit Hero Guo tomorrow. Until then..."

Huang Rong was alarmed and handed the letter over to Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu to read. She said, "The walls of Xiangyang may be solid but how can it hold out skilled fighters? The enemy is planning an attack but your Uncle Guo is hurt and I can't do much, what are we going to do?"

Yang Guo said, "Uncle Guo..."

Xiao Longnu looked at him with a scolding glance. Yang Guo knew she was angry with him for risking his life and saving Guo Jing. He closed his mouth and didn't say a word.

Huang Rong began to get suspicious and said, "Miss Long, Guo'er has not fully recovered yet, we can only rely on Brother Zhu Ziliu and you to fight off the enemy."

Xiao Longnu has always said whatever that was on her mind and said coldly, "I will protect Guo'er and only him; other people's lives are nothing to do with me."

Even more questions appeared in Huang Rong's mind but she didn't say much about it. She said to Yang Guo, "Uncle Guo said that it was thanks to your efforts that you managed to escape."

Yang Guo thought about the many times he had wanted to kill Guo Jing and felt ashamed of himself. He said, "I'm

useless, it was my fault that Uncle Guo has become injured.”

Huang Rong said, “Just rest. When the enemy comes, we’ll win by our wits if we can’t win with force.” She turned to Xiao Longnu and said, “Miss Long, come with me, I have something to say to you.”

Xiao Longnu hesitated, “He...” Since Yang Guo returned to Xiangyang, Xiao Longnu had not left his bedside. When she heard Huang Rong summon her, she was afraid that something might happen to Yang Guo.

Huang Rong said, “The enemy said that they will attack tomorrow, nothing is going to happen tonight. I have something to say to you about Guo’er.” Xiao Longnu nodded and whispered instructions to Yang Guo to be careful before leaving the room.

Huang Rong took her to her own room and closed the doors. She said, “Miss Long, you want to kill my husband and I, don’t you?”

Xiao Longnu might be naïve but she was by no means a fool. Xiao Longnu had made her mind up about killing the Guo couple to save Yang Guo’s life. So no matter what Huang Rong would ask her, there was no way she was going to reveal anything to her. However, Huang Rong knew what she was like so she went straight to the point and asked her just like that. Xiao Longnu was shocked by this and hesitated, “I... I... you treat us so well, why should I... why do I want to kill you.”

Huang Rong saw her face had become red and knew that she had guessed correctly so she continued, “You don’t have to keep it from me, I knew long ago. Guo’er blames us for his parents’ deaths and wants to kill us to avenge his father. You love Guo’er so of course are going to help him achieve his wish.”

Xiao Longnu could not deny any of this and kept silent for a while. She eventually gave a sigh and said, "I really don't understand."

Huang Rong said, "Don't understand what?"

Xiao Longnu said, "Why did Guo'er risk his life today to save Master Guo? He and Jinlun Fawang and the others had agreed to kill master Guo together."

When Huang Rong heard this, she was extremely shocked. She knew that Yang Guo was up to no good but she never could have imagined that he would actually hook up with the Mongolians. She didn't let any of this show on her face and pretended that she knew all along and said, "It must be because of how well Master Guo has treated him. In the end, Guo'er could not make himself go through with it."

Xiao Longnu nodded and said mournfully, "There's nothing more I can say. Since he has decided to let his life slip away then so be it. I have always known that he is the kindest person in the world. He'd rather die than hurt his enemy."

Many thoughts ran through Huang Rong's mind but she could not figure out what her words meant. When she saw Xiao Longnu's mournful expression, she comforted, "There are still some things you don't know about the death of Guo'er's father, we'll clear everything up with him later on. His injuries are not serious, all he needs are just a few days rest, there's no need for you to be upset."

Xiao Longnu stared at her for a while before bursting into tears and sobbing, "He... he's only got seven days to live, how's resting a few days going to help?"

Huang Rong was stunned and quickly asked, "What is this about only seven days to live? Quickly tell me, we'll find a way to save him."

Xiao Longnu shook her head but eventually she revealed all; the events of the Passionless Valley, how Yang Guo fell victim to the Passion Flower, how Qiu Qianchi gave him half the antidote only and telling them to trade the other half of the antidote for the lives of the Guo couple in a deadline of just eighteen days. She told of the suffering that one goes through when poisoned by the Passion Flower and how the other half pill is the only antidote that exists in the entire world. The more that Huang Rong heard, the more shocked she became. She could never have guessed that Qiu Qianren and Qiu Qianzhang would have a sister named Qiu Qianchi and that this sister would end in such a state.

After explaining everything, Xiao Longnu said, "He's only got seven days left, even if we kill you and your husband tonight there's no guarantee that we'll make it back in time, why should I still want to try to harm you? I just want to save Guo'er; I don't care about avenging his father."

Huang Rong had previously thought that the only reason that Yang Guo was up to no good was because of his father's death, but who would have thought that there were so many other reasons buried within. Saving Guo Jing was just the same as deciding to kill himself. A person that can do such a heroic deed as this is really something to commend.

She stood up slowly and paced back and forth across the room. Even with her intelligence, she could not come up with something to get out of the pressing situation they were in; in just a few hours time, the enemy will come and attack. She may have consoled Yang Guo by saying that 'if they can't win with force then they'll win by wits' but how? How?

Xiao Longnu had just one thing on her mind; Yang Guo. Huang Rong however had two; her husband and her daughter. She was thinking, "How can I keep brother Jing and Fu'er safe?" A thought went through her mind, "Guo'er could

risk his life for others so why can't I?" She then turned around to Xiao Longnu and said, "Miss Long, I have a way to save Guo'er, will you agree to it?"

Xiao Longnu trembled in delight in reaction to this and said, "I... I... even if I have to die... what's death, even if it's something ten times worse than death... I'm... willing..."

Huang Rong said, "Fine, only you and I can know about this, you must not let it slip out."

Xiao Longnu agreed instantly.

Huang Rong said, "Tomorrow, you and Guo'er will protect master Guo; once the danger is over, I will give you my head and you can ride the red horse to get to Passionless Valley and obtain the Passionless Pill."

Xiao Longnu was stunned. She asked, "What?"

Huang Rong said softly, "You value Guo'er more than you value your life, don't you? As long as he's safe and well, you will be happy even if you're dead, right?"

Xiao Longnu nodded, "Yes, how do you know?"

Huang Rong gave a smile and said, "It's because I love my husband the same way as you love Guo'er. You don't have a child so you don't know that a mother's love for her child is also as strong. I just want you to protect the safety of my husband and daughter, what else could I want?" Xiao Longnu didn't reply.

Huang Rong said, "If you and Guo'er don't fight together, we won't be able to fight off Jinlun Fawang. Guo'er saved my husband and I on many occasions, can't I save him just once? The red horse can run a thousand li (500km/310miles) in a day; you will be able to reach Passionless Valley within three days. Let me tell you, Qiu Qianzhang and Guo'er's father

were harmed by me alone, it has nothing to do with Master Guo. Once Qiu Qianchi sees my head, she will have no choice but to hand over the antidote even if she feels it's not enough. Afterwards, it would be great if you two can help to defend the country; but even if you decide to live in some secluded place by yourselves, I will still be touched."

It was clear, there was no other way. In the past few days, Xiao Longnu had been trying to come up with a way to kill Guo Jing and Huang Rong to save Yang Guo. But after hearing these words from Huang Rong's own mouth, she felt uncomfortable and kept on shaking her head, "We can't, we can't!"

Huang Rong was about to explain again when suddenly Guo Fu's voice came from the door, "Mother, mother, are you there?" Her voice sounded urgent.

Huang Rong was shocked and asked, "Fu'er, what is it?"

Guo Fu opened the door and threw herself straight into her mother's arms, ignoring the fact that Xiao Longnu was there. She called out, "Mother, the Wu's are..." She burst into tears.

Huang Rong creased her brows and said, "What is it now?"

Guo Fu choked, "They... they are fighting outside the city."

Huang Rong was furious and shouted, "Fighting? They are fighting each other?"

Guo Fu had rarely seen her mother get so angry and was frightened herself. She mumbled, "Yes, I told them to stop but they didn't listen... they said... they said they were going to fight to the death. They said only one would return... even if the loser doesn't die, they will not come back to... to see me."

The more Huang Rong heard the angrier she got. The lives of the army and the people of the city were at stake here and these two brothers were actually fighting each other over a girl. Her anger disturbed her womb causing her great pain; sweat could be seen on her forehead. She lowered her voice and said, "It must be your doing, tell me everything now."

Guo Fu glanced at Xiao Longnu and became red. She called out, "Mother!"

Xiao Longnu was longing for Yang Guo and had no time to hear about this matter. She turned around and left the room to be with Yang Guo. Her mind was pondering Huang Rong's words.

Guo Fu waited for Xiao Longnu to leave the room before saying, "Mother, it was entirely my fault that the two went to assassinate Khubilai. Father ending up hurt trying to get them was my fault. If I don't tell you all about it, how can I face my mother and father?" She then told her mother about how both brothers were trying to please her and how she suggested going to assassinate Khubilai. Anger filled Huang Rong but she could not let it out, she just rolled her eyes at her with displeasure.

Guo Fu said, "Mother, what shall I do? Each of the brothers has their own good points, how can I choose one over the other? Isn't my suggestion about killing our enemy what you and father want? Whose fault is it that they are so useless and got captured immediately?"

Huang Rong said, "The Wu's martial arts aren't the best, you know that."

Guo Fu said, "What about Yang Guo? He's only a few years older than them, how did he battle Fawang and break out of the camp at the same time and never got caught?" Huang Rong knew that her daughter had been spoiled ever since

she was born and so even at times when Guo Fu knew that she was wrong, she would still try to argue to get her way. Huang Rong did not inquire further about this matter and just said, "They've come back now, why are they fighting outside the city?"

Guo Fu said, "Mother, it's your fault; it's because you said they are shameful disciples."

Huang Rong was shocked and said, "When did I say that?"

Guo Fu said, "I heard from the Wu's that when Huo Dou came with the letter, you told them to capture him but instead they had their pressure points sealed. You then blamed them for being useless."

Huang Rong gave a sigh and said, "If they can't compete with others, what can I do? Huo Duo was the one who called them shameful disciples."

Guo Fu said, "Even so, you didn't argue with him and just stayed silent. The two couldn't accept it and started arguing amongst themselves, saying how it was each other's fault. One blamed the other for being too slow and one blamed the other for getting in the way. The argument became heated and soon they drew their swords. I said 'If you fight in the city and let others see, what'll happen then? Anyway, father is still recovering; if you bring any more trouble to him I will never see either of you again.' They then said, 'Fine, we'll fight outside the city.'"

Huang Rong stayed silent for a while before saying with anger, "I've got much more pressing matters on my mind at the moment. If they want to fight then let them fight all they want."

Guo Fu hugged her elbow and said, "Mother, if either of them gets injured, what then?"

Huang Rong replied, "If the two were injured while trying to fight off the enemy then they deserve our care. But they deserve to die if they are fighting each other." Guo Fu saw that her mother had an angry expression on her face. This was completely different to the way she normally talked to her so she didn't dare say anything else. She left the room and closed the doors.

It was now dawn. Light was coming through the windows; Huang Rong was alone in her room. Though she was angry with the Wus, she was still concerned about them; after all, she had watched them grow up over all these years. Her thoughts then turned to the impending danger and tears flowed from her eyes. She was worried about Guo Jing's injury so she went to see how he was.

Guo Jing was sitting on his bed in meditation when she entered the room. Though his face was pale, his breathing was even and deep. She knew that all he needed was to rest for a few days and he would be back to full health. Memories of when they were younger came flooding back. She thought of the time when they were recuperating in Linan.

Guo Jing slowly opened his eyes and saw that his wife had been crying. A smile appeared on his face as he said, "Rong'er, you know my injury is not serious, what are you worried about? You need more rest than me."

Huang Rong smiled, "Yes. My womb has been acting up over the past few days. Your Polu or Guo Xiang is about to see their father." She was afraid that Guo Jing would worry if he knew about Huo Dou and the letter so she kept it from him, as well as what the Wus were up to.

Guo Jing said, "Tell the Wu brothers to be on extra alert when patrolling the city, the enemy knows that I'm injured and will most probably take this opportunity to attack." Huang Rong nodded. Guo Jing continued, "How's Guo'er's injury?"

Before Huang Rong could reply, the sound of footsteps followed by Yang Guo's voice could be heard from outside the room, "Uncle Guo, I just have superficial injuries, I'm fine now after taking Auntie Guo's Nine Flowers Jade Dew Pill." He then opened the door and entered the room. He continued, "I've been to the city walls and took a look around; everyone is on high alert but the Wus are..." Huang Rong coughed and made a signal to him with her eyes. He immediately understood and said, "The Wus said that it was their fault that you are injured so if the enemy comes to attack, they will fight to the end to repay their debts to you."

Guo Jing sighed, "After this experience, I hope that the Wus are now wiser and don't see everything as achievable."

Yang Guo said, "Auntie Guo, isn't Gu Gu with you?"

Huang Rong replied, "I had a little chat with her just now, she's probably gone back to her room for some rest. Ever since you came back, she hasn't slept a wink."

Yang Guo gave an 'en' sound and assumed that after their little chat, Xiao Longnu must have gone back to see him. She must have just missed him when he went out to take a look around along the city walls. When he first arrived at Xiangyang, he had his mind set on killing the couple. But after the experiences of these past few days and seeing how they risked their lives for the country and how Guo Jing risked his life saving him, he changed his mind and had now decided to repay them by helping them in any way he could. He knew that he only had seven days to live but he didn't care; as long as he could do one or two good deeds in these few days he could say that he has been able to do something with his life. He knew that while Guo Jing was injured, the enemy would definitely take this opportunity to attack the city. As soon as he recovered, he immediately went along the city walls to survey the current situation.

He was longing for Xiao Longnu and was about to leave the room in search of her when suddenly laughter could be heard from the rooftops about one hundred feet away. Two loud noises followed as gold clashed with silver; Jinlun Fawang had arrived.

Guo Jing's face changed slightly and he pulled Huang Rong, trying to hide her behind him.

Huang Rong said, "Brother Jing, what's more important, Xiangyang or us? Are you more important or am I?"

Guo Jing let Huang Rong go and said, "Yes, the country comes first!"

Huang Rong took out her bamboo rod and went over to the door. What she had discussed with Xiao Longnu had yet to reach Yang Guo's ears, what was he going to do? Will he help to repel the enemy or will he take advantage of the situation to avenge his father and save his life? His thoughts have always been shrouded in mystery, if he does turn on us it will be even more trouble. Though she was guarding the door, she kept her eye on him.

Though what the Guo couple had said didn't seem much, in Yang Guo's ears, they rang loud and true. Guo Jing's kindness had touched him and he had already decided to pay him back with his life and help him. But as he heard the words 'the country comes first', something stirred in him and he began to remember the teaching of Guo Jing of a few days earlier, "a hero's duty is to serve your country, serve your people," and, "holding your body to the task until your dying day". He saw how deeply the couple loved each other, but even with themselves in such danger, they put the country first. Yet he could not let the death of his father go and he could not let Xiao Longnu out of his mind; when had he ever thought about his country? When had he ever worried about

the suffering of his people? He felt extremely ashamed of himself.

Suddenly, a childhood memory came flooding back to him. It was a memory of Huang Rong teaching him on Peach Blossom Island; the teaching was along the lines of 'dying for a righteous cause' and 'giving your life for justice'. It was now clearer to him than ever before. He seemed a little frightened by this, yet at the same time felt inspired. With life and death now on the line, many things that he'd never thought about never cared about suddenly became crystal clear. He seemed to be a different person with this newfound spirit, taller, bigger and brighter.

Many thoughts flickered through his mind. All this had happened in a short space of time. Huang Rong watched as his face turned from confusion to shame, from poignant to resolute but she couldn't fathom what he was thinking.

Suddenly Yang Guo said quietly, "You can relax!" Unsheathing the Gentleman Sword, he made his way to the door.

Jinlun Fawang stood on the rooftop with a wheel in each hand. He laughed, "Brother Yang, how does it feel to be a man who goes back on his word?"

If it were the Yang Guo of old, these words would definitely have angered him, but the present Yang Guo was calm and clear. He thought to himself, "You're right; my mind had never been set until this day. From now on, no matter how long I live, I will never be one who goes back on their word." He laughed, "Fawang, you're right. I don't know what came over me that day; I don't know why I helped Guo Jing escape. But once he got back to Xiangyang, I don't know where he's gone and I can't find him, It's only now that I've regretted what I've done. Do you know where he is?" He then leapt up to the roof and stood a few feet in front of him.

Fawang squinted, he knew that this little kid was very crafty and didn't know whether he was telling the truth or telling a lie. He laughed, "If you find him, what will you do?"

Yang Guo said, "There's a sword in my hand."

Fawang scoffed, "Huh, you'd actually dare stab him?"

Yang Guo said, "Who said I'd stab him?"

Surprised, Fawang replied, "Who then?"

The Gentleman Sword pierced the air as it came towards Fawang's left side very quickly. At the same time, Yang Guo laughed, "You of course!" This attack came out of nowhere and with great force. With the close distance and being caught unaware, had Fawang's martial arts been just a little lower, like that of Nimoxing and Xiaoxiang Zi, he would surely have died from that attack. Fawang managed to react in time and gathered chi in his left arm and blocked the attack. However, the Gentleman Sword is an extremely sharp blade, his arm was cut by the sword and he suffered a wound inches deep and blood flowed.

Fawang might have known that Yang Guo was sly, but he would never have guessed that he would actually attack him. Getting injured like this just as he entered Xiangyang enraged him and he attacked furiously with the golden wheel in his right hand and at the same time, he threw the silver wheel in his left towards Yang Guo. Yang Guo stood his ground and took three stances before replying with three stances. He laughed, "I owed you one from your attack at the Mongolian camp. Let me tell you something, do you know that there's something special about this sword?"

Fawang couldn't help himself and asked, "What?" as he attacked continuously with his silver wheel.

Yang Guo laughed, "Let me tell you that it's not my fault."

Fawang said, "Damn you punk! What's not your fault?"

Yang Guo said smugly. "This sword came from the Passionless Valley. Gongsun Zhi likes to use a bit of poison here and there so if you want to take revenge, go find him."

Fawang was slightly alarmed as he wondered whether Gongsun Zhi would have laced his swords with poison. Unsettled, his stances become slower.

In reality, what poison was there on the sword? Yang Guo remembered how Huang Rong had scared away Huo Dou with tea and because he knew that his martial arts were not Fawang's match, he tried to use words to disturb his enemy. As soon as he saw it had worked, he concentrated on defending and waited for a chance to pounce. Though Fawang's injury was not serious; even without poison, the wound bled non-stop and as time went by, he would definitely tire. In the current situation, it would be to his advantage to have a quick battle so he hurried his wheels and attacked with even more vigor.

Yang Guo knew what Fawang intended to do and he defended even harder than usual. The power behind Fawang's wheels was getting greater and greater. Suddenly, Fawang's golden wheel attacked upwards and his silver swept across leaving Yang Guo with no other choice but to leap back. Fawang tore a piece of his sleeve off to wrap up his wound but as soon as he did this, Yang Guo came at him again. This game of cat and mouse continued on for a little while before Fawang decided on another plan; as soon as Yang Guo leaps back, he would leap back also and at the same time, throw his silver wheel. This would force Yang Guo to go back even further. This would leave him with enough time to tend to his wound. By the time Yang Guo came back for another attack, Fawang had wrapped up his wound. The fact that there didn't seem to be any discomfort from his

wound indicated that the blade was probably not laced with poison; he relaxed.

At that same time, the sounds of clashing weapons could be heard from a southeastern direction. Yang Guo glanced over and saw Xiao Longnu engaged in battle with Xiaoxiang Zi and Nimoxing. In Xiaoxiang Zi's hand was a rod that looked exactly like the one that Yang Guo had snatched away and lost in his daze at the Mongolian camp, did this one contain poison as well? With the Guo couple directly below him, Yang Guo knew that it would be disastrous if Fawang finds them, he needed to lure him away. He must make sure that he didn't reveal his intentions to Fawang so he called out, "Gu Gu, don't worry, I'm coming!" After a few leaps, he landed behind Nimoxing and he sent his sword forward.

Fawang was of course furious with Yang Guo after being wounded by him but he had come to Xiangyang for Guo Jing; Yang Guo could wait. He called out loudly, "Guo Jing, Hero Guo, I've come to visit; why aren't you here to greet your guests?" He called out a few times but there was no reply.

Shouts and calls could be heard from the northwest; it was his two disciples Da'erba and Huo Dou fighting Zhu Ziliu. The fight between Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu with Nimoxing and Xiaoxiang Zi wasn't going to end anytime soon. More and more guards were coming to see what was going on. Fawang knew that these guards wouldn't be able to do anything to him but in numbers, they would make things cumbersome for him, so he called out again, "Guo Jing, oh Guo Jing, you are a so called Hero so why are you hiding away like some coward?"

He was becoming more and more insulting; the calls went on as he attempted to anger Guo Jing into coming out, but still, there was no sign of him. He thought, "There are thousands of homes in Xiangyang, who knows where he's hiding? He's

willing to accept this abuse to keep his life, but once his injuries have recovered it will be difficult to kill him.” He pondered for a little while and an evil plan hatched. He leapt down from the roof and found where the firewood was kept. He took out his fire knife and splint to the firewood and lit it. He went around and lit several piles of firewood before leaping back up to the roof. Once the fire spreads, Guo Jing will have no choice but to come out.

Though Yang Guo was in battle with Xiaoxiang Zi and Nimoxing, he kept his eye on Fawang. When he saw Fawang suddenly set the place on fire and the rooms north and south of Guo Jing’s room started smoldering, he became alarmed and, as he did so, he almost let Nimoxing’s Iron Snake strike him across the chest. He quickly moved out of the way. If Guo Jing hadn’t broken Nimoxing’s ribs a few days earlier, this attack would have left Yang Guo seriously injured.

Yang Guo thought, “That was close!” His thoughts then turned to Guo Jing. “Uncle Guo is seriously injured and Auntie Guo’s due to give birth. If the two don’t come out then they’ll be trapped by the fire, but if they do, they’ll run into that bald scoundrel.” He had no choice but to leave Xiao Longnu alone to fight the two; so he quickly thrust out two stances towards Xiaoxiang Zi and leapt down. He dived into the fire and flames to look for the Guo couple.

He found Huang Rong by Guo Jing’s bed but at same time, smoke was pouring through the windows. Guo Jing had his eyes closed and was meditating; Huang Rong appeared weak and fragile. When she saw him enter, she could only smile. Yang Guo was put at ease a little when he saw that the two weren’t alarmed and immediately thought of a plan. He whispered, “I’ll lure them away. Take uncle Guo to some place safe and hide.” He then lightly took off Guo Jing’s hat and leapt out of the window.

Huang Rong didn't know what he was up to but the smoke was getting closer and closer. She reached out to help Guo Jing up and she said, "Let's find another place to rest." As soon as she used an ounce of her strength in her arm, she felt a pain in her stomach. She sat down on the bed and cursed, "You little devil, you've got a great sense of timing haven't you; do you want to kill your daddy and mommy?" There were a few days before she was actually due but all the stress and commotions of the past few days had inadvertently sped the birth along.

As soon as Yang Guo leapt out of the window, he saw guards shouting and bellowing everywhere; some were taking buckets of water to dampen the flames, others were firing arrows towards the rooftop. There were some who were slashing their weapons about jumping and cursing. He jumped behind a guard in grey and sealed his pressure point. Yang Guo placed Guo Jing's hat on him and lifted him onto his back. He then leapt up to the rooftops whilst swirling his sword around.

At this time, Xiao Longnu and Zhu Ziliu who were fighting two opponents each in the form of Nimoxing and Xiaoxiang Zi, and Huo Dou and Da'erba, and were losing. Jinlun Fawang on the other hand was threatening Guo Fu with his wheels, waving them around inches away from her face to force her to reveal her parents' location. Guo Fu's hair was in a mess and her sword tip had been smashed to pieces by Fawang's golden wheel, but she bit down on her tongue and kept on fighting, ignoring Fawang's questions. She was extremely angry inside as she thought, "If the Wus hadn't gone off to kill each other, the three of us could take care of this bald scoundrel." She couldn't help herself blurting out, "Fine, go and fight amongst yourselves, I don't care who wins, you'll just be coming back to a corpse!"

Fawang was dumbfounded by her words; “What? Where is Guo Jing?”

He was waiting for Guo Fu to reply when he spotted Yang Guo making his escape in a northwesterly direction with a person on his back; this had to be Guo Jing. He left Guo Fu and immediately chased after Yang Guo. Huo Dou, Da’erba, Xiaoxiang Zi and Nimoxing had also spotted Yang Guo and they left their opponents and chased after Yang Guo. Zhu Ziliu followed to help Yang Guo protect Guo Jing.

When Yang Guo was on the roof, he ran past Xiao Longnu, winked and smiled at her with a crafty expression on his face. Xiao Longnu knew he was up to something but she didn’t know what. With so many people chasing after him, she wanted to go with him to help him but at the exact same time, she heard crying from below; the crying of a baby.

Guo Fu said with joy, “Mother’s given birth!” and leapt down.

Xiao Longnu was curious and along with the fact that Yang Guo seemed to have things under control, she wanted to take a look at Huang Rong’s child, so she too leapt down from the rooftops and followed.

Jinlun Fawang chased after Yang Guo with great effort and saw the distance between them getting smaller and smaller. He thought, “Let’s see how you’re going get out of this one.” He saw that the person on Yang Guo’s back was wearing the same hat that Guo Jing was wearing a few days ago and was sure that it was him.

The Ancient Tomb’s lightness kung fu that Yang Guo had learned could be said to be unequalled under heaven’s skies; even with someone on his back, Fawang would not be able to catch up with him for the time being. Yang Guo ran along the rooftops for a while but he soon heard the footsteps behind him getting closer and closer, so he leaped down into an

alleyway and ran around in circles, playing hide and seek with Fawang.

Yang Guo's lightness kung fu may be a level higher than Fawang's but after all, there was someone on his back. If it was in the open, Fawang would have caught up long ago but in the dark and twisty alleyways, he was able to keep one step ahead of Fawang. After circling in the alleyways a few times, Nimoxing, Xiaoxiang Zi and Zhu Ziliu arrived.

Fawang said to Nimoxing, "Brother Nimo, guard the end of the alley, I'll chase the rabbit out of its den."

Nimoxing rolled his eyes and shouted, "Why the hell should I listen to you?"

Fawang felt that Nimoxing was being unreasonable. He leaped up to the rooftops and took a look around; he spotted Yang Guo trying to catch his breath in a dark corner with Guo Jing on his back. He quietly went closer to him overhead, but just as he was about to jump down and catch him, Yang Guo suddenly called out and disappeared into the smoke.

Fawang had set the fire to force Guo Jing out, but now the smoke from the fire was making it difficult for him to catch Yang Guo. As he was looking around, Da'erba suddenly called out, "He's over there!"

Fawang followed his voice to find Da'erba fighting Yang Guo with his golden rod. Fawang went forward to block Yang Guo's escape route. Yang Guo dashed ahead and in a flash, he was by Da'erba's side. At the same time, Fawang's silver wheel had come shooting out.

The silver wheel came like the wind leaving Yang Guo with no time to dodge; a tearing sound was heard as it brushed past 'Guo Jing', leaving a deep wound.

Fawang was delighted and called out; "Ha! I hit you!"

However, Yang Guo kept on running, ignoring whether or not 'Guo Jing' was still alive or not.

Yang Guo made his way to the end of the alley only to hear a cackling voice, "Little boy, just give up!" It was Xiaoxiang Zi with his rod blocking the end of the alleyway. Yang Guo had no way forward and no way back, he looked upwards and saw a black figure; it was Nimoxing. Yang Guo leapt up but Nimoxing used his Iron Snake to strike downwards, wanting to force him back down into the alleyway. Yang Guo calculated that by now, he had given the Guo couple enough time to escape so he took the guard off his back and threw him towards Nimoxing, calling out, "Here, I'll let you have Guo Jing."

Nimoxing was delighted by this turn of events, he had thought that Yang Guo would give him a lot of trouble, but who would have thought that he would give up and actually give him such a great gift? He stretched out his hands to catch him. Yang Guo sent out a powerful kick that struck him on the behind, sending him down into the alleyway.

Nimoxing called out in delight, "I've got Guo Jing; I'm Mongolia's Greatest Warrior!"

Da'erba and Xiaoxiang Zi were never going to let him take this prize on his own without a fight and both went over to him. The three of them held on to the guard pulling at him with great strength and with such force, that the guard tore into three pieces. The hat fell off the guard's head and only then did the three see that it was not Guo Jing. Stunned, they stood there speechless.

When Fawang saw that Yang Guo had left Guo Jing, he knew something was up so he did not go forward to struggle with the three. Seeing them standing there in a daze, he scoffed, "Idiots!" He continued to go after Yang Guo, thinking that,

even if he does not capture Guo Jing, taking Yang Guo's life would be a good day's work.

But by now, Yang Guo was nowhere to be seen, how was he going to find him? Fawang thought for while and came up with a plan, "Yang Guo must have lured us away from the real target. Guo Jing must have been near where we first started. Fine, I'll lure him out." He made his way to where the flames were strongest.

Yang Guo was hiding underneath a rooftop, observing what was happening. He watched as Fawang headed in Guo Jing's direction. Yang Guo did not know whether Guo Jing had escaped to another place yet so he followed Fawang quietly. Fawang ran back to near the room where Guo Jing was and leapt down. He called out, "So Guo Jing, you're hiding here. Come with me!"

Yang Guo was shocked and was about to jump down when he heard the sounds of clashing weapons. Fawang called out; "Guo Jing, surrender now!" The sounds of clashing metal rang loudly.

Yang Guo rolled his eyes and laughed, "Bald bastard, I almost fell for your trick. Your plan is flawed, why the sound effects? In Uncle Guo's condition, how can he exchange stances with you? And how could he last so long? I'll hide here and watch what else you'll get up to."

Suddenly, Fawang called out, "Yang Guo, this time you die!"

Yang Guo was puzzled, "What's this about me dying this time?" He then knew what Fawang was planning, "Oh, you can't get me to come out so now you're trying to get Uncle Guo to out to save me."

He heard Fawang laughed, "Yang Guo oh Yang Guo, you've lived long enough."

As soon as he finished, a white blur came out of the smoke; a young girl had darted forward and was thrusting her sword towards him.

Yang Guo called out, "Gu Gu, I'm here!" However, Fawang swung his wheels and blocked Xiao Longnu's way. When Fawang was trying to give the impression that Yang Guo was in danger, Xiao Longnu heard him and of course she was concerned so she came dashing out.

Yang Guo rushed forward armed with his sword. After a smile to each other, the two of them used the "Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden Swordplay", trapping Fawang within the boundary of the swords.

Fawang cursed, "What have I done?" Scalding smoke, burning pillars and falling debris were all around them.

Fawang put everything he had behind his wheels to fend off the swords and quickly retreated to the northwestern corner.

Yang Guo said, "We can't let him escape, we must get rid of him once and for all." He aimed for Fawang's back with his sword.

After tasting defeat from the "Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden Swordplay", he pondered and tried to come up with a way that would defeat it. But this swordplay was deep and profound, the two users became as one and it was like fighting against a great martial artist who had four arms and four legs. He didn't have much confidence as to whether or not he could actually defeat this swordplay, but in this dangerous situation, he had no other choice but to use the "Cyclone of the Five Wheels" that he had been working on. Though there were still many weaknesses with this technique, he had to give it a try so he searched his body and with a ringing sound, three wheels were in the air and one each in his hands. His five wheels were of different

weights and of slightly different sizes, and they come to and from his hands as he pleased; slanting in the air sometimes and suddenly straightening up.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu felt their eyes dazzled and were slightly alarmed. Yang Guo sent two stances to the left as he leaned right, Xiao Longnu immediately responded and she too sent out numerous stances to the right with her Lady Sword. She moved with force and shifted towards Yang Guo. The two saw that the enemy's stances were too strange so they decided to defend first and try to grasp the techniques that Fawang was using before coming up with a counterattack in response.

Fawang's wheels turned and flew about but the two's swords flew up and then crossed, forming a net of light. Though the power of the five wheels was great, it was unable to penetrate the swords. He sighed, "Looks like even with using five wheels, I am still unable to defeat their swordplay." Just as he was feeling dejected, a baby's crying could be heard coming from Xiao Longnu's arms. Fawang was shocked at this sudden turn of events but he wasn't the only one; Yang Guo was extremely surprised. In shock, their stances slowed.

Xiao Longnu patted the child in her arms with her left hand and said, "Don't cry precious, and watch me drive that monk away." However, the baby cried even louder.

Yang Guo said, "Its Auntie Guo's?"

Xiao Longnu nodded and sent a piercing stroke towards Fawang.

Fawang swept his golden wheel across and blocked the attack. He didn't hear Yang Guo and didn't know what Xiao Longnu was doing with a baby in her arms; but since she's got extra baggage, her swordplay will suffer so he threw out his golden wheel and attacked Xiao Longnu.

Yang Guo intercepted the attacks and turned his head towards Xiao Longnu, asking, "Uncle and Auntie Guo are safe?"

Xiao Longnu said, "Chief Huang and Master Guo escaped..." A clashing sound was heard as she parried Fawang's bronze wheel. She continued, "It was becoming dangerous as it looked like the beam in the ceiling was about to collapse so I took the baby girl..."

Yang Guo slashed out at Fawang's right leg and neutralized the lead wheel's attack directed at Xiao Longnu before asking, "It's a girl?" Yang Guo was slightly surprised that it was another girl since Guo Jing had a daughter already.

Xiao Longnu nodded, "It's a girl, here quickly take her..." She was about to hand the baby over to Yang Guo.

But amongst the cries of the baby, Fawang's attacks were becoming more and more ferocious. Three wheels circled in the air and attacked from the above while vicious attacks still came from the wheels in Fawang's hands.

Yang Guo had to use every ounce of strength he had to fend off these attacks, how could he take the baby?

Xiao Longnu called out, "Quickly take the baby and use the red horse to go to..."

Ringling sounds were heard as the two wheels became more and more threatening; Xiao Longnu no longer had time to speak. The two's thoughts were not in line and so they could not unleash the full power of the swordplay.

Yang Guo knew that if he took the baby from Xiao Longnu, she would no longer be distracted so he moved towards her slowly. Xiao Longnu wanted to hand the baby over to him and now that their thoughts were the same, the power of the swordplay suddenly increased. It was as if the sword had

lengthened and Fawang was forced backwards two steps. Xiao Longnu handed the baby over to Yang Guo and he was just about to take it when a black blur suddenly came towards them; the iron wheel was sent flying towards the baby. Xiao Longnu was afraid that the baby would get hurt so she loosened her grip on the baby and used her left hand to catch the wheel. The iron wheel was coming towards her with great force and it was extremely sharp but Xiao Longnu was wearing the golden silk gloves, and as she met the wheel, she followed the force of the wheel and pushed it to the side to dampen the urgent spinning of the wheel before finally pushing up and catching the wheel; it was a great use of the 'Four Liangs Against a Thousand Jin' theory.

By now, Yang Guo had the baby in his hands and when he saw the wheel in Xiao Longnu's hand, he called out, "Wonderful!"

If Fawang had sent the wheel towards Xiao Longnu, she would not have been able to catch it; she was only able to catch it because the wheel was aimed at the baby.

Xiao Longnu was delighted when she caught the wheel but the icy expression on her face remained. Suddenly, she copied the form of Fawang and raised the wheel, smashing it towards her enemy; she wanted to give him a taste of his own medicine.

Fawang was alarmed, with one wheel missing; his "Cyclone of the Five Wheels" was neutralized. He decided to take in two of his wheels and just use two in his hands, cutting and slashing forwards.

Yang Guo held the baby with his left arm and said, "Let's kill this bald scoundrel first and talk later."

Xiao Longnu said, "Fine!" Her left hand held the iron wheel across her chest as she attacked with Yang Guo. With another

powerful weapon in her hand and with one thing less to worry about, she should have become more powerful but after a few stances, she found that her sword strokes did not match Yang Guo's and they found it difficult to unite.

This swordplay's power lies within the user's pure and complete love for each other, right now the wheel between the two swords was an extra thing. It was like placing a third person between a pair of lovers, causing trouble and unrest, how could their thoughts become one now? The two did not know what was wrong for the time being and after a few more exchanges; they actually found themselves worse off than fighting individually.

Xiao Longnu was getting anxious and she said, "We can't beat him today, quickly take the baby to Passionless Valley and..."

Yang Guo now knew her intentions; if he rode the red horse now, he would definitely be able to reach Passionless Valley within seven days time. Though he wouldn't have the heads of Guo Jing and Huang Rong for Qiu Qianchi, by taking the baby to Qiu Qianchi and telling her that they'll definitely come for it, she would be able to come up with her own way to take revenge. Qiu Qianchi would definitely hand over the antidote. As soon as he recovers, he can rescue the baby from danger. Qiu Qianchi would definitely fall for this plan. If it were two days ago, Yang Guo would have agreed without any hesitation but now, Guo Jing's patriotic spirit had left him in complete awe, he could not risk Guo Jing's daughter for himself. Taking his daughter to Passionless Valley was taking advantage no matter which way you look at it; it is not the act of a true man and because of this he kept quiet before saying, "Gu Gu, no!"

Xiao Longnu said, "You... you..." She had only said two words before a tearing sound was heard as the cloth on her left

shoulder was cut by Fawang's golden wheel.

Yang Guo said, "If I do such a thing, how can I face Uncle Guo? I would not be worthy of using this sword?" He raised the Gentleman Sword.

Xiao Longnu did not know about his sudden change of mind, all she was concerned about was to rid the poison in his body. After hearing him say that he can't treat the person who killed his father like this and how he wants to be a honorable gentleman, she couldn't stop herself from feeling shocked.

With the differing thoughts, it was even more difficult for the swords in their hands to respond. Fawang took this chance to advance forward and elbowed Yang Guo on the left shoulder.

Yang Guo felt numbness go through him and the baby in his arm dropped. The three of them had been fighting on the rooftops and now the baby fell towards the ground. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu both cried out wanting to jump after it but it was too late.

Fawang had heard what the two had said and now knew that the baby was Guo Jing and Huang Rong's daughter. He may not have caught Guo Jing but by having his daughter as hostage, he could force Guo Jing to surrender, what more could he want? It was now getting urgent and he sent out the golden wheel with his right hand, which intercepted the falling baby.

The wheel was five feet above the ground, carrying the baby with it. The three of them leapt down from the roof to grab the wheel. Yang Guo was closest and saw that the wheel was flying closer and closer to the ground and soon will hit the ground. He immediately rolled over towards the wheel, wanting to sandwich himself between it and the ground so he could take the wheel and baby at the same time, keeping her

safe. Suddenly, an arm stretched out from the side and grabbed the wheel, taking the baby with it. The person turned and ran.

Yang Guo got up and Xiao Longnu and Fawang dashed over to him. She said, "It's my apprentice sister."

Yang Guo saw that the person was wearing an apricot yellow gown and was holding a fly whisk; it was indeed Li Mochou. How could the baby be safe now that it had fallen into the clutches of this evil woman? He immediately ran after her.

Xiao Longnu called out, "Apprentice sister, apprentice sister, that baby is very important, what are you doing?"

Li Mochou did not turn back and replied from afar, "Every generation of my Ancient Tomb sect have been virgins yet you have actually given birth, how shameful!"

Xiao Longnu said, "It's not my child, give it back to me." She called out many times but as she did so, she loosened her chi and she was left behind. She saw that they were headed north and so she followed.

The city was filled with soldiers; as some tried to control the fire and others hunted down the spies. Xiao Longnu ignored them all and ran to the city walls to find Lu Youjiao with a group of Beggar Clan members patrolling the northern gate in case the enemy wished to take advantage of the city being on fire and attack.

As soon as he saw Xiao Longnu he asked, "Miss Long, are Chief Huang and Hero Guo safe?"

Xiao Longnu ignored his question and instead asked, "Have you seen Master Yang and Jinlun Fawang? Have you seen a woman carrying a child?"

Lu Youjiao pointed outside of the city and said, "The three of them leapt down from the wall and left."

Xiao Longnu was startled; the wall was extremely high, even with supreme martial arts your legs and arms would break if you jumped down from such a height; how did the three manage this feat? She was just about to inquire further when she spotted a Beggar Clan member brushing the precious red horse and a thought went through her mind, "Even if Guo'er somehow manages to snatch the baby back, without this horse, how will he get to the Passionless Valley in time?" She darted over to the horse and took its reigns before saying to Lu Youjiao, "I have an urgent matter to attend to and I need to leave the city with this horse."

All Lu Youjiao was concerned with was the safety of Huang Rong and Guo Jing and he asked again; "Are Chief Huang Rong and Hero Guo safe?"

Xiao Longnu mounted the horse and said, "They're safe. Chief Huang's baby daughter has just been snatched away; I need to get her back." Lu Youjiao was shocked by the news and immediately ordered the gate opened.

The city gate was only opened a few feet and the drawbridge had yet to touch the ground when Xiao Longnu had made her way out. After one slap, the gallant red horse flew over the moat spectacularly. The on looking guards all cheered at the spectacle.

Outside the city walls, Xiao Longnu saw the crushed corpses of two soldiers by the city wall along with the carcass of a horse. She looked all around but how would she know what direction they were headed? She was now anxious and desperate. She stroked the neck of the horse and said, "I'm trying to find your baby master, please take me there!"

Who knew whether the horse understood or not but it raised its head and neighed before galloping in a northeasterly direction.

After chasing Li Mochou to the top of the city wall, both Yang Guo and Jinlun Fawang thought with the walls being at such a height, there would be no where else for her to go. However, as soon as she reached the top of the city walls she grabbed a soldier and threw him off the wall before following herself. Before the guard reached the ground, she used him to break her fall and threw herself forward, gliding down to the ground, all without disturbing the baby. The soldier died without ever making a sound.

Fawang cursed, "What a vicious woman!" He did as she did and sent a guard down from the wall using him to break his fall.

Yang Guo could not bring himself to use someone else as a cushion for himself but it was getting urgent. Just at this moment, his mind lit up and he sent a steed off the city wall and before it landed, he leapt onto the horse's back. While the horse met its death, Yang Guo continued his chase.

During the battle at the Mongolian camp a day earlier, Yang Guo was wounded twice by Fawang's wheels and though the injuries themselves were not serious, he had lost a lot of blood, his body was weak and after another day of intense fighting, he felt he could not last much longer. But as he thought about the dreadful fate that would fall upon his Uncle Guo's daughter in the hands of either Li Mochou or Jinlun Fawang, he ignored his pain and urgently chased after them.

The three of them had been running extremely fast but with Li Mochou having to carry a baby and with Fawang taking precautions about his possible poisonous sword wound, none of them were traveling as fast as before. A few miles later,

with Xiangyang far behind them, there was still about a distance of a hundred feet between them. Fawang could not catch up with Li Mochou and Yang Guo could not catch up with Fawang.

After a while, Li Mochou saw that there were hills and mountains in front of her so she sped that way thinking it would be easier to lose her pursuers in the mountain valleys. Though she had heard Xiao Longnu say it was not her child, after seeing how Yang Guo risked life and limb for it, she was sure that it was their bastard child and as long as it was in her hands, they could be forced to hand over her sect's "Jade Maiden's Manual" to her.

The further they went the higher they got as the terrain became more mountainous and wooded. Fawang was afraid that if he didn't stop her now, should she hide in the dense woodland, it would be difficult for him to find her. He had never fought Li Mochou before but after seeing her excellent lightness kung fu, he knew that she would be a strong foe. He had lost two of his wheels and didn't want to risk throwing any. But it was getting urgent, he could not waste any more time so he called out, "Lady, leave the child and I'll spare your life; if you don't, then don't blame this monk for being merciless."

Li Mochou laughed and sped up once again. With a wave of his right arm, he sent out his silver wheel. The wheel became a white streak as it headed for Li Mochou's back.

Li Mochou could not ignore the force of the incoming weapon and she turned around, deciding to use her fly whisk against it. However, as soon as she saw how fast the wheel was turning she changed her mind. She was afraid that her weapon would break; she decided to move out of the way instead. Fawang advanced two steps and threw out his bronze wheel. This time, he threw it outwards so that it would

curve in, smashing its target on its way back. Again, Li Mochou did not dare to take this attack head on; she moved back three steps and bent her waist, using advanced lightness kung fu to avoid this attack. Now, there was only about thirty feet between she and Fawang. Fawang caught his silver wheel with his left hand and threw the lead wheel in his right hand towards her left shoulder.

Li Mochou whirled her fly whisk to the side, forming thousands of golden needles that rained toward Fawang's eyes. Fawang threw his silver wheel upwards to block the attack while at the same time with his free hand; he caught his incoming bronze wheel. He crossed his arms and his wheels collided, ringing throughout the valley. His silver and bronze wheels had changed hands and he now started to use lethal attacks with both.

With a great foe in front of her, Li Mochou's spirit stirred, who would have thought that this tall and skinny monk would possess such great strength and be so swift in his attacks. She fought with everything she knew and gave it everything she had.

After a few exchanges, Yang Guo had made his way to them. He watched from the side, catching his breath and waited for a chance to snatch the baby back. The two of them were fighting quicker and quicker with a fly whisk whirling about amongst the three wheels.

When it came to martial arts and internal energy, Fawang was a level higher than Li Mochou along with the fact that Li Mochou was carrying the child; she would surely be defeated within a hundred stances.

However, towards the beginning of the fight when Li Mochou was trying to protect the child from the sharp blades of the wheels, she noticed that whenever the wheels came close to the baby, Fawang would quickly take the attack back and

she then knew what he was trying to do, "That bald bastard wants to take the child and he doesn't want to hurt it."

With her ruthless nature, she didn't care about the safety of others and now that she knew what Fawang was up to, whenever she found herself unable to withstand his vicious moves, she would hold the baby up to protect herself. The baby was now no longer a hindrance but instead a powerful shield, as soon as it was raised, no matter how vicious and ruthless Fawang's stances were, they would all be taken back.

Fawang attacked several times with the wheel but each time he was forced back by Li Mochou using the baby as a shield. Yang Guo watched with anxiety; a mistake by either of them would surely send the baby to its death. Just as he was about to make his move, Fawang suddenly smashed out and inwards with the silver wheel in his right hand and pushed forward with the bronze wheel in his other hand; by doing this, the wheels trapped Li Mochou within his arms.

Li Mochou's face went red; what kind of monk would actually use such a stance? She whirled her fly whisk behind to block the silver wheel and raised the baby in front of her to protect her chest. When Fawang had decided to use this particular stance, he had calculated the response; he loosened his left finger and his bronze wheel shot upwards towards her face.

The wheel was only about inches away from her; with the wheel suddenly flying towards her like that with such great force, it was not going to be easy to fend off this attack. Luckily for her however, she was an experienced fighter after all these years in the world of Jiang Hu; experience that far exceeded that of Fawang. In this danger she leaned back with her feet nailed to the ground and sent an attack of her own towards his shoulders. Fawang shrugged his shoulders and the fly whisk brushed past; however there were a few

threads that had struck his shoulder. His left hand was empty and so, he chopped down onto her left arm. Li Mochou's arm immediately went numb and she cried out in pain. She leapt away but something was missing; the baby had been snatched away by Fawang.

Just when Fawang thought he had succeeded, a gust of wind came from his side; it was Yang Guo throwing himself forward to grab the baby. Rolling on the ground, he swung his sword into a web of light to protect his body and as he got up, he used a stance of "Sailing with the Waves", stopping his two foes from getting close to him.

When he saw that the baby had fallen into Fawang's hands, he knew that as soon as Fawang got a proper hold on her, it would be near to impossible to snatch her back so he risked life and limb to get her back. In a flash, the baby had exchanged hands twice.

Li Mochou praised him; "Yang Guo, exquisite move!"

Fawang was furious and he knocked his wheels together, the wheels ringing like the roar of a dragon. He waved out his left sleeve and threw the wheel in his right hand towards Yang Guo. Yang Guo pretended to stab forward before turning around to run but something breezed past him; it was Li Mochou blocking his path with her fly whisk. She smiled, "Yang Guo, no running! Let's see you fight a bit with that monk first." Yang Guo saw that Fawang's bronze wheel was only inches away from him; he had no choice but to raise his sword and block the attack.

After dueling with each other for so long, the two were very familiar with the other's martial arts and both attempted to beat the other with speed. The two became a blur as three streaks of light danced around; in a flash the two had exchanged over twenty stances.

Li Mochou was shocked, thinking, "It wasn't too long ago that I last saw him, how on earth has he achieved such a level of martial arts?"

Yang Guo had made improvements in his martial arts but some of the improvement was due to the fact that he knew that he didn't have long to live. He decided to repay Guo Jing back with his life and so, when a dangerous stance came at him, he didn't care and instead replied with one of his own, forcing Fawang to adjust.

Yang Guo may not have cared about his life but it was a different story with the life of the baby. Though he saw that Fawang's and Li Mochou's stances avoided the baby during their fight, this was Guo Jing's child and he was not going to employ the tactic that Li Mochou used and risk the safety of the child. By putting the safety of the child first, he was soon facing death in the face.

Against Li Mochou, Fawang had to take extreme care in avoiding the baby but with Yang Guo doing the opposite of Li Mochou and protecting her, he began to aim for the baby more than he did at Yang Guo. As a result, Yang Guo was forced on the back foot ever further and he couldn't last much longer. He called out, "Martial Uncle Li help me against this bald bastard."

Fawang glanced over at Li Mochou who was standing there watching the fight with a smile on her face.

Fawang didn't understand, "Xiao Longnu called her apprentice sister and she is indeed his apprentice uncle, why isn't she helping? Are they planning something? I need to wound this kid and snatch the baby first." He increased the power in his attacks leaving Yang Guo almost defenseless.

Li Mochou knew that Fawang would not harm the child, no matter how many times Yang Guo asks for help she'd just

ignore him. She placed her hands behind her back and watched at leisure.

After a while, Yang Guo felt a throbbing pain in his chest. He knew that his internal energy could not compare with his opponent; he would not be able to last much longer fighting as hard as this. He hadn't heard the baby's cries for a while and was afraid something was wrong, so he looked within his arms only to see an adorable face with pearl black eyes starring back at him.

Yang Guo had never got on with Guo Fu but he felt something towards this baby girl in his arms, "In seven days time I'll be dead, I'm risking my life and limb for her today and if by some miracle I managed to save her, I wonder whether she'll remember me a few years when she's all grown up like her sister?" In such an emotional state, he almost cried.

Li Mochou saw that he was exhausted and knew that he'll soon die by the twin wheels; she was about to go forward and help him when she thought, "This kid's martial arts have made great improvements, I better leave it to the monk to finish him off to save me future trouble." So, she kept to the side.

Of the three, Fawang had the highest martial arts, Li Mochou was the most ruthless but Yang Guo was the most cunning. After he got over his sadness, he immediately came up with a plan, he thought, "When Auntie Guo told me the story of the Three Kingdoms, she said that Cao Wei was the strongest and when Shu Han rebelled against Cao Wei, Shu needed the help of Sun Quan." Li Mochou may not offer help but he can offer his help to her. He blocked Fawang's attack and threw the baby over to her calling out, "Catch!"

This action was something that Li Mochou did not expect, she didn't know what he meant by this action but took the baby

anyway.

Yang Guo called out, "Apprentice Uncle, take the baby and leave, I'll hold the monk up!" He sent two strokes forward with all his might, keeping Fawang back.

Li Mochou thought, "Oh, he's hoping I'll still respect the fact that we are of the same sect and so I'll keep it alive."

How would she know that Yang Guo had an ulterior motive, as soon as she tried to make her escape, Fawang smashed his silver wheel towards her back, switching his attention from Yang Guo to her. This stance came at her extremely fast and she tried to adjust her movements but the silver wheel followed her like a shadow. Li Mochou had no choice but to use her fly whisk to block the attack.

Yang Guo breathed out a sigh of relief when he saw that his plan had worked, but he did not wait by the side and watch the two destroy each other like Li Mochou had done. As soon as he gathered his breath he immediately dived in and attacked Fawang.

The sun was in the sky and light shone through the canopy of the forest. Yang Guo felt freshened and his swordplay became more fluent. A ringing sound was heard as the Gentleman Sword slashed a piece of the bronze wheel off. Fawang was slightly alarmed but his attacks became even more vicious.

Yang Guo thought of another trick and called out, "Martial Uncle Li; be careful of that wheel, don't let where the wheel was cut touch you, it has poison on it."

Li Mochou said, "How?"

Yang Guo said, "My sword has poison on it!"

After Yang Guo wounded Fawang, Fawang had been worried about being poisoned but because he had yet to feel any effects from wound, he had ceased worrying. Now upon hearing Yang Guo's words, he thought, "Gongsun Zhi is a ruthless man, its more likely than not that there is indeed poison on that sword."

Li Mochou suddenly whirled her fly whisk forward and said, "Guo'er, pierce him with your poisoned sword." She waved her hand out, appearing to shoot some kind of projectile. Fawang used his wheels to protect himself. Li Mochou was trying to scare him off, she knew that with Fawang's martial arts, her "Soul Freezing Needles" would most probably miss the target but this little pause allowed her just enough time to move out of the wheel's range and escape.

Though Fawang suspected there was poison on Yang Guo's sword, his wound had not swollen up and there were no ill effects after all this time. He did not want to leave empty handed after all this trouble and immediately chased after Li Mochou.

Who knew when the battle would end? With them chasing and fighting like this, Yang Guo was worried that if this was kept up, the baby would catch a chill or the like; even if he does manage to rescue her it might end up all in vain. He knew that the first thing he must do is to use Li Mochou to help to defeat Fawang before dealing with her. He called out loudly, "Martial Uncle Li, there's no need to run! This bald bastard has been poisoned, he won't live for long." As soon as he finished, Li Mochou darted into a cave.

Fawang stopped in his tracks and did not dare to enter. Yang Guo did not know what she was going to do with the baby and without care for his life, he burst into the cave with his sword across his chest. He saw a silver flash and immediately

knocked three Soul Freezing needles out of the air. He called out, "Martial Uncle Li, it's me!"

It was pitch black in the cave but he had the ability to see in the darkness; Li Mochou was holding the baby with her left hand and her right was holding some silver needles. To show that he had no ill intent, he turned his back to her and said, "We need to defeat that bald bastard first." then guarded the entrance of the cave.

Fawang knew that the two would not come out for the time being and so he loosened his gown and tended to his wound. He saw that his blood was crimson red and when he touched the wound it ached, after circulating his internal energy he discovered there wasn't anything wrong. He was happy but also furious with Yang Guo for tricking him into worrying about poison for almost half a day. The entrance of the cave was covered with grass and only allowed for one person to enter at a time; with his height he would not find it easy to maneuver if he burst in and would most probably fall victim to an ambush.

Just as he was trying to come up with a plan, he heard a strange voice behind him calling out, "Hey monk, what are you doing here." It was the voice of the Indian dwarf, Nimoxing.

Fawang kept his eye on the cave and said, "Three rabbits have just entered the cave, and I'm going to force them out."

After leaving empty handed from Xiangyang, Nimoxing was on his way back to the Mongolian camp when he saw from a distance Fawang's silver, bronze and lead wheels flying about in the air. He knew that he was in battle with someone and tracked him down. After seeing Fawang staring at the cave, he asked, "Guo Jing is in there?"

Fawang scoffed, "There's two male rabbits and a female one."

Nimoxing was delighted when he heard this and said, "So, not only are the Guo couple in there but also that rascal Yang Guo."

Fawang ignored him and after a look around, he came up with an idea. He gathered some dry wood and placed it in front of the cave before lighting it. The wind was blowing southwesterly and the smoke poured into the cave.

When Fawang was placing the dry wood in front of the cave entrance, Yang Guo knew what he was up to and said quietly to Li Mochou, "I'll check if there's another exit." He went back into the cave which was about sixty feet deep and found that it was a dead end. He returned to her and said, "Martial Uncle Li, they are trying to smoke us out, what shall we do?"

Li Mochou thought that there was no way that she would be able to escape from Fawang if she dashed out, but staying in the cave and getting suffocated wasn't a good plan either. If worse comes to worse she'll just leave the baby behind; with Fawang's main target being the baby, he'll probably let her go. She wasn't anxious and just smiled.

Not long after, the smoke had filled the cave and the two of them held their breath. The baby however started crying and coughing.

Li Mochou chuckled, "Are you upset?"

After the life and death battle that he had experienced with the baby, he started growing attached to her. When he heard her crying louder and louder, he said, "Give her to me!" He stretched out his hands and advanced two paces.

Li Mochou snapped her fly whisk down towards his arm and said, "Don't come any nearer! Aren't you afraid of my Soul Freezing needles?"

Yang Guo leapt back. When he heard the words 'Soul Freezing Needles' a sudden thought popped into his head. He remembered the time when he first met Li Mochou and picked up one of her needles. After just holding it for a little while, he was poisoned. He tore off a piece of cloth from his gown and wrapped it tightly around his right hand before going over to the three needles that Li Mochou had previously shot at him and picked them up. He planted the needles in the ground leaving about an inch of the tip above surface and then he covered them with sand and dirt to conceal the shininess of the needles. The cave entrance was blocked with a fire and the cave was filled with smoke; Fawang and Nimoxing did not see what Yang Guo had done.

After he had finished his trap, Yang Guo went over to Li Mochou and said quietly, "I've got a plan, try to stop the baby from crying." He then called out, "Great, there's an exit; we can get out of here." His voice was filled with joy.

Li Mochou was surprised and actually believed that there was another exit.

Yang Guo then whispered into her ear, "It's a lie; I'm trying to lure that bald bastard into my trap."

Fawang and Nimoxing were shocked when they heard this and believed that they had escaped. It seemed to be true when it suddenly became quiet and the cries of the baby died down. How could they know that Yang Guo had covered the cries of the baby with his sleeve? Nimoxing did not take any time to think and immediately flew around to the other side of the mountain to stop them. Fawang however took his time and noticed that cries of the baby were just muted; they were not coming from afar. He knew that it was Yang Guo trying to trick him into going around the back of the mountain so he could escape with the baby.

He chuckled, "Do you think I'm stupid!" He hid beside the entrance of the cave and armed himself with his wheels as he waited for Yang Guo to come out.

Yang Guo then called out, "Martial Uncle Li, that scoundrel has gone, let's leave." Suddenly he whispered, "We'll both shout in surprise at the same time and trick him into the cave."

Li Mochou didn't know what he had planned but she was well aware of his cunning after falling for his tricks before. Since he was sure of his plan, it would definitely work. Luckily for her, the baby was still in her hands, so after driving away Fawang, Yang Guo would still have no choice but to bring the "Jade Maiden's Manual" to her. She nodded.

Both of them cried out, "You...!" Yang Guo pretended that he was wounded and called out, "Why... why?" He then whispered, "Pretend that you are about to die."

Li Mochou said furiously, "You... though I... have died by your hands today, I'm... not going to die alone." Her voice silenced.

Fawang was delighted when he heard this, he thought that the two had fought over the baby and had destroyed each other before even leaving the cave. He was afraid that the baby would die along with them and if that happened, he would not be able to blackmail Guo Jing. So he brushed away the fire and entered the cave. Just two steps in; he felt a pain in the bottom of his foot.

He made a swift adjustment, and before he trodden down fully, he immediately pushed back with his right foot and leapt back out of the cave. When he landed, his left leg was numb and he almost fell down. With his profound internal energy, even after suffering several hacks and slashes from a knife, he could still remain upright; he realized at once that

he had trodden on something extremely poisonous. Just as he was about to take off his shoe and examine the wound, he heard Nimoxing returning and he was calling out, "That lying punk, there's no entrance at the back, the Guo couple are still in there."

Fawang took his hand away from his shoe and acted normal, saying, "You're right, but there's no more noise coming from the cave, they must have fainted from the smoke."

Nimoxing was delighted when he heard this thinking that finally he has managed to capture Guo Jing alive. However, he did not give a second to himself to think about why Fawang would allow him to do this without a fight. He whirled his Iron Snake to protect himself as he dashed into the cave.

Yang Guo had planted the needles in such a way that no matter how large or small your stride is, you will, step into one of them. Nimoxing was short, had small steps and a fast pace, his right foot stepped onto one and before he could react, his left foot stepped onto another. India is a hot and dry place and the people there don't wear shoes, Nimoxing was no different; though his feet had been conditioned to be as hard as leather, the Soul Freezing needles are extremely sharp and they punctured his feet. He was a manly fellow; a little pain was nothing to him. He used his Iron Snake to check if there were sharp objects and found nothing. Just as he was about to continue on his way to catch Guo Jing and his wife, his legs suddenly went limp and he collapsed. It was only now that he knew that the poison on the sharp objects was extremely venomous and he quickly rolled out of the cave.

He saw that Fawang had taken off his shoe and was holding a black and swollen left foot. Fawang was using his internal energy to suppress the poison.

Nimoxing was furious and he roared, "Bastard, you fell for that trap so why the hell didn't you tell me about it?"

Fawang smiled, "I fell for it and you fell for it, both of us have suffered."

Nimoxing could no longer control his anger as he sputtered, "I... no need capture Guo Jing...Nimoxing...rotten monk...a fight to the death!"

He could no longer use his legs; Nimoxing pushed the ground with his left hand and threw himself forward at Fawang while his right hand smashed down towards Fawang's head with his Iron Snake. Fawang raised his bronze wheel to block the Iron Snake and then swept his arm across, throwing his elbow out. With his body in midair, it was difficult for Nimoxing to avoid this blow; Fawang's elbow came at him extremely fast and struck him in the shoulder.

Nimoxing may have been thick boned, but this attack from Fawang left him in great pain. In such a state of fury he didn't give a damn about his life and threw himself at Fawang again. He hugged him tightly and bit down on Fawang's 'Qi Abode' pressure point. If everything was normal, Nimoxing would never be able to get so close to Fawang and hug him. Even if he did manage to grab him, how would he ever get a clear path towards Fawang's 'Qi Abode' pressure point? But right now, Fawang had fallen victim to an extremely lethal poison and was using all his internal energy to suppress it at the 'Bending Spring' pressure point. As long as he didn't let the poison spread, the most serious thing that would happen to him is the loss of a foot; his life would be safe. When Nimoxing threw himself at Fawang, Fawang had in effect lost his internal energy and was relying on his external martial arts to fend him off. Nimoxing however was giving everything he had and he bit down on the pressure point and didn't let go.

Fawang hooked out his right foot and with Nimoxing having lost use of his legs, they both fell down. Fawang tried to pull him off but with a vital pressure point held down, his strength had diminished, how could he pull him off? He could only hold Nimoxing's 'Great Shuttle' pressure point on his neck to stop him from making a fatal blow. The two were great martial artists but after falling victim to poison, they were now brawling on the ground, and not reflecting their martial arts status.

The two of them rolled around and were getting dangerously close the edge of a cliff. Fawang saw what was happening and he called out, "Let go, another roll and we'll fall to our deaths."

But Nimoxing had lost all his senses, with his internal energy unoccupied, his was greater than Fawang's and Fawang was unable to stop Nimoxing from pushing forward. Just a few inches away from falling into a deep chasm, Fawang's survival senses came to life and he called out, "Guo Jing's here!"

Nimoxing stopped and said, "Where?" As he said this, his mouth loosened. Fawang's pressure point was no longer blocked and he regained his strength, sending out a left palm. Nimoxing knew that he had been tricked and he lowered his head and threw his waist forwards.

Fawang's palm was meant to force Nimoxing back but he had forgotten that, after being poisoned, Nimoxing's legs were no longer in his control, how could he jump back? Instead of sending him back, Nimoxing was now going forward and the two bumped into each other, knocking them over the edge.

When Li Mochou knew that Yang Guo's plan had worked, she secretly praised him. After hearing Fawang and Nimoxing struggling with each other, she thought the danger was over

and was about to exit the cave. Suddenly she heard the two letting out a strange scream.

This was the scream of the two when they fell over the edge. With the cliff being over a hundred yards away and with a boulder blocking their view, they could not see what was happening.

Li Mochou said, "Hey kid, what are they up to?"

Yang Guo could not have guessed that the two had actually fallen off a cliff and said, "That damn monk is very sly, it could be possible that he is copying our trick of being injured to lure us out."

Li Mochou agreed and whispered, "Yes, they must be trying to trick us out to get my antidote." She walked to the entrance in order to take a look at what exactly was happening.

Yang Guo said, "Be careful of the needles." As soon as he said this he regretted his words; "Why should I warn that witch?"

Li Mochou quickly pulled her feet back. The fire at the entrance of the cave was now out and she could not see in the dark like Yang Guo could, if she had continued her steps, she would surely have stepped onto the needles. She may have the antidote but the poison was very lethal, it would leave her in great pain. If she had stepped on one, Yang Guo would have taken advantage and she might have died by her own poisonous needles.

She said, "Remove the needles, why should we stay in here?"

Yang Guo said, "Let's wait for the poison to finish them off."

Li Mochou scoffed at his reply. She was extremely wary of Yang Guo, the longer she stayed with him in the cave the more danger she was exposed to. When it came to martial

arts, she wasn't confident that she could defeat him and she certainly wasn't going to out think him. She lowered her head and tried to think of a way out.

Silence filled the cave. The two were preoccupied with their own thoughts. Suddenly, the baby cried. Ever since she was born, she hadn't been fed; it was a cry of hunger.

Li Mochou chuckled, "Where's my apprentice sister? Don't tell me that she's going to let her child starve to death?"

Yang Guo replied, "Who said its Gu Gu's child, its Hero Guo's."

Li Mochou said, "Do you think using Hero Guo's name would scare me? If it were someone else's child, why would you risk life and limb for it, it's got to be the bastard child of you and her."

Yang Guo shouted angrily, "Yes, I do want to marry Gu Gu but we're not married yet, how can we have a child? Watch your words."

Li Mochou scoffed, "If you want me to watch my words then you should watch your actions."

Yang Guo worshipped Xiao Longnu, how could he not be furious? He shouted, "My Master is pure and chaste, don't tarnish her name."

Li Mochou said, "Pure and chaste sounds so nice, it's just a shame that the virginity spot on her arm is gone."

A whooshing sound was heard as Yang Guo thrust his sword towards her chest. He shouted, "You can insult me but not my Master, I'm going to kill you." Whoosh, swish, swoosh; three strokes in a row were unleashed. His swordplay was clever, his eyes could see in the dark, Li Mochou only survived because she could hear the weapon coming through the air.

Though she didn't get hit, these stances left her staring at death. Luckily for her, Yang Guo was watching out for the baby, he held back on his most threatening stances in case she decided to take the child with her.

The two of them fought for over ten stances when suddenly the baby gave a howling cry before falling silent.

Yang Guo was afraid and immediately took back his sword. His voice was shaking as he said, "You've hurt the baby?"

When Li Mochou saw how much he cared for the baby, she was even more convinced that he was the father and said, "Right now it's alive, but if you don't follow my orders, do you think I'll keep it alive?"

A chill went through Yang Guo. He knew that she was a cold blooded murderer; if someone merely offended her just one little bit she would kill them and destroy their whole family. Killing a newly born child would be nothing to her. He said, "You are my Martial Uncle, as long as you don't insult my Master, of course I'll follow your orders."

Li Mochou could hear that he was willing to back down and knew that as long as the baby was in her hands, he could do nothing. She said, "Fine, I won't insult your Master, you'll obey me. Go out and take a look and see how they are doing against the poison."

Yang Guo obeyed and went outside. He took a look around and didn't see anyone, but he was wary that Fawang was hiding around somewhere so he hacked and slashed the surrounding trees and bushes. He found no one so he returned to the cave and said, "They're gone, the poison must have scared them off."

Li Mochou said, "Huh, even if they ran, how far are they going to get after falling victim to my poison? Go and pick up

the “Soul Freezing Needles” from the cave entrance and hand them over to me.”

After hearing the non-stop cries of the baby, he knew that he should go out and find something for the baby to eat so he followed her instructions. He wrapped his hand with a piece of cloth and gave the needles back to her.

Li Mochou put the needles away and headed for the exit. Yang Guo followed and asked, “Where are you taking the baby?”

Li Mochou said, “Back to my home.”

Yang Guo said anxiously, “Why do you want the baby? It’s not yours.”

Li Mochou blushed before saying with a serious tone, “What are you saying? If you hand over the Ancient Tomb’s “Jade Maiden’s Manual”, I’ll hand the baby back to you without harming a single of its hair.” She then started to use her lightness kung fu and headed north.

Yang Guo followed her and said, “You’ve got to feed her some milk first.”

Li Mochou turned around with a flushing face and shouted, “What the hell are you saying boy?”

Yang Guo said with surprise, “What? I’m just saying that the baby needs milk, otherwise, won’t she starve?”

Li Mochou said, “I’m a pure and chaste virgin, how will I have milk for her?”

Yang Guo smiled, “Martial Uncle Li, I’m saying that you should find some milk for her to drink, I’m not asking for your milk...”

When Li Mochou heard this, she couldn't help but laugh. She had stayed single and chaste, she lived a life of swords and sabers, and she knew nothing about caring for a child. She said, "Where can we get milk? How about feeding her rice?"

Yang Guo said, "Has she got any teeth?"

Li Mochou opened her mouth and shook her head, saying, "Not even one."

Yang Guo said, "We'll go to a village, find a woman who's just given birth and can produce milk to feed her, how about that?"

Li Mochou said with delight, "You are indeed full of ideas."

They climbed to the top of a hill and looked all around. Far away in the west, there was smoke. The two of them traveled very quickly and arrived at a small settlement in a short period of time. The area around Xiangyang had been incinerated and the Mongols had destroyed the large towns and villages near the main roads, the only types of settlements remaining were those in the wild and secluded valleys.

Li Mochou checked the houses one by one and when she got to the fourth one, she found a woman feeding a year old child. Li Mochou was delighted that she had found someone, she went in and picked up the child from the woman's arms and flung it away towards a bed. She then placed the baby girl's mouth in the woman's breast and said, "This child's hungry, feed it."

The woman's child was flailing its arms and legs, crying its eyes out on the bed. The woman quickly went to pick up her child. When Yang Guo saw that the woman was exposed, he quickly turned his back to her before hearing Li Mochou say, "I told you to feed my child, didn't you hear? Who told you to

hold your own child?" Yang Guo heard a thud and quickly jumped around just to see the woman's child by the wall with its head covered in blood. The woman was distraught and put Guo Jing's daughter down and threw herself onto her child, crying and sobbing as she did so.

Li Mochou was furious and she lifted her fly whisk to strike down onto the woman's back.

Yang Guo quickly used his sword to block this blow and thought, "How can there be such an irrational woman?" However, the words that came out of his mouth were, "Martial Uncle Li, if you kill her, there won't be anyone else left to feed the child."

Li Mochou replied angrily, "I'm looking out for your child yet here you are sticking your nose in where it's not wanted."

Yang Guo thought, "This child isn't mine yet you keep on saying so, and if it is, then how can I be sticking my nose in?" He smiled and said, "The baby is hungry, the most important thing right now is to feed her." He then stretched out his hands for her.

Li Mochou raised her fly whisk and blocked his arm, saying, "You dare pick her up?"

Yang Guo took a step back and smiled, "Fine, fine! You take her."

Li Mochou picked up the baby and was just about to place it back into the arms of the woman when she discovered that she was gone. While the two were arguing, the woman had slipped out with her child. Li Mochou was filled with rage and dashed outside to see the woman running away. She flew up and struck down with her fly whisk with a gust of wind; both mother and child died under that strike. She went to find another woman to feed the child but the settlement was

filled with men. Li Mochou became even angrier and she killed a few people at random. She then picked up a burning stick from a stove and set a few thatched houses on fire before leaving the settlement.

Yang Guo sighed to himself when he saw how vicious Li Mochou was. They didn't say a word as they wandered across the plains for several li. The baby had cried itself to sleep in Li Mochou's arms.

Li Mochou suddenly stopped in her tracks; there were two leopard cubs in front of her playing with each other. She took a step forward with the intention of kicking them away when she heard a roar from the side as a leopard leapt at her. She was startled by this and moved to the left. The leopard immediately turned around and leapt forward once again, clawing and slashing. Li Mochou raised her fly whisk and struck the leopard between the eyes. The leopard growled in pain and became even more vicious showing its sharp white teeth. It crouched on the ground and stared at its enemy with its gleaming eyes, waiting for a chance to attack.

Li Mochou waved out her left hand and shot out two needles at the leopard's eyes. Yang Guo called out, "Wait!" He blocked the needles with his sword while at the same time the leopard pounced; it leapt ten feet into the air speeding at him. Yang Guo leapt up and after knocking the needles out of the air with his sword, he punched the leopard on the spine. The leopard was in pain from this blow but immediately after it landed, it attacked again. Yang Guo moved to the side and sent out a left palm with half his energy. The leopard was sent rolling back.

Li Mochou wondered what he was up to; the needles that she had shot out would have killed the leopard, why is he wasting so much effort to save it? She watched as Yang Guo sent out a left palm here and right palm there, keeping the

leopard on the ground. He was relentless but each palm of his avoided the vitals of the leopard. The leopard's roars were becoming quieter and quieter, and after ten palms, it could take it no longer and ran away. Yang Guo was prepared for this and reached out for its tail to pull it back but after being defeated, the leopard ran away dejected with its tail hanging down between its legs and Yang Guo missed. He was about to use his lightness kung fu to chase after it when he saw the leopard turn around and call to its cubs to run. Yang Guo now knew what to do and he picked up the cubs, one in each hand.

Seeing its cubs being captured, the leopard no longer cared about its life and threw herself at Yang Guo once again. Yang Guo threw the cubs at Li Mochou and called out, "Catch them but don't kill them." He leapt up higher than the leopard and aimed to land on its back. When he landed, he pulled at its ears. The leopard used all her strength to throw Yang Guo off but she was no longer in control of her movements.

Yang Guo called out, "Martial Uncle Li, quickly get some tree bark and make some rope to tie it up."

Li Mochou said with annoyance, "I don't have time to mess around with you." She turned around to walk away.

Yang Guo said quickly, "Who's messing? This leopard can give milk!"

Li Mochou now understood and was filled with delight, she laughed, "Only you would come up with something like this." She then went off and tore off ten pieces of tree bark and made a rope with it. She first tied its mouth before tying its legs.

Yang Guo patted the dust off himself and smiled. The leopard could not move and its eyes showed that it was filled with fear.

Yang Guo stroked its head and said, "We just want your milk, and we won't kill you."

Li Mochou then placed the baby at a teat. The baby was starving and suckled immediately. The leopard could provide a lot of milk and as soon as the baby was full she closed her eye and slept.

Their gaze never left the baby girl as she fed and fell asleep. The two were filled with delight as they watched her smiling in her sleep and they smiled at each other.

The smile shared between these two dissolved most of the wariness between them. Li Mochou's face was filled with tenderness and she hummed a song as she held the baby in her arms. Yang Guo found some soft hay and made a bed on a large rock beneath a shady tree. He said, "Let her sleep here!"

Li Mochou quickly signaled with her hand, telling him to be quiet. Yang Guo stuck out his tongue and made a face at her. As he watched the baby sleep peacefully, he gave a sigh of relief before turning his heads to the cubs who were feeding off their mother.

The scent of flowers filled the air, a warm breeze blew through their clothes, the aura of death disappeared as both man and beast felt at ease.

Yang Guo had been through hell and high water in the past few days and it was only now that he could unwind. But it was in the strangest of circumstances; there was a cold blooded murderer to one side of him and a vicious beast on the other.

Li Mochou sat beside the baby and used her fly whisk to chase away the forest's flies. Her fly whisk had killed countless people and could send shivers down the spines of

the people of Wulin; yet now it was doing the first kind thing it had ever done.

Yang Guo watched Li Mochou as she stared at the baby. Sometimes there was a smile, at others there would be sadness on her face. She would look overwhelmed then suddenly, peace would fill her face. Yang Guo guessed that she must have been looking back on her life. He did not know much about her; all he knew were a few things that Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang had told him. Behind all these cruel and vicious acts was someone who must have endured bitter suffering; he had always hated her but right now, he couldn't stop himself from pitying her a little.

After a while, Li Mochou lifted her head and her eyes met Yang Guo's. She was slightly taken aback by this. She said quietly, "It's getting dark, what are we going to do about tonight."

Yang Guo looked around and said, "We can't take that big leopard with us, we'll find a cave to spend the night in for the time being and decide on what to do tomorrow." Li Mochou nodded her head.

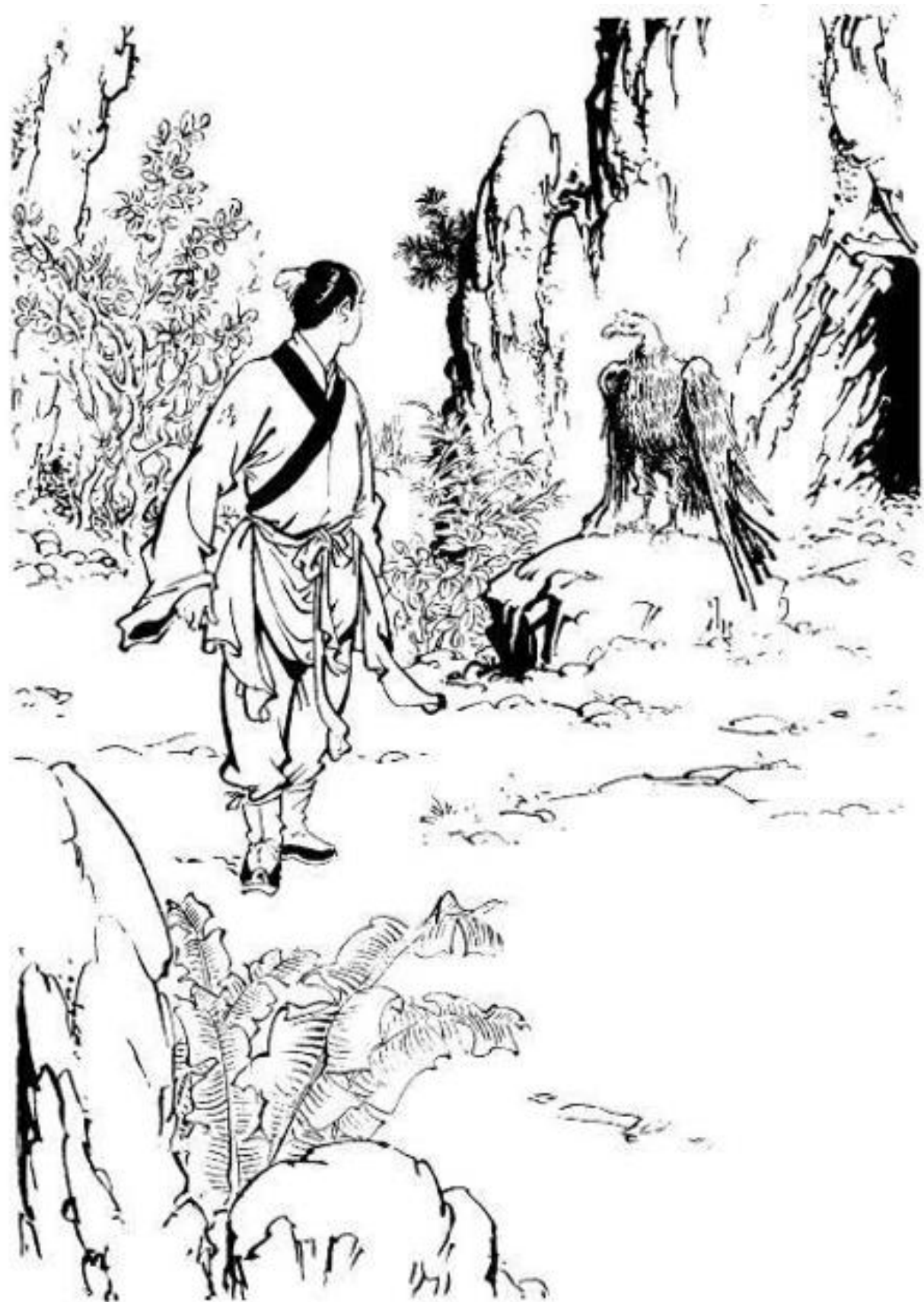
Yang Guo looked all around and eventually found a cave that was just about suitable. He gathered some long grass and made a small and large bed in the middle of the cave. He said, "Martial Uncle Li, rest here, I'll go find something to eat." He then went off in search of some food. He was back within the hour with three rabbits and some wild fruits. He untied the leopard's mouth and fed one of the rabbits to it. He then gathered some firewood and roasted the other two rabbits for Li Mochou and himself. Afterwards, Yang Guo said, "Martial Uncle Li, go to sleep, I'll go outside and guard the cave." He took out a long rope and suspended it between two trees, and slept on the rope in midair.

This didn't surprise Li Mochou at all; after all, it was a skill of the Ancient Tomb. Apart from occasionally traveling with her disciple Hong Lingbo, she had always wandered alone. Tonight she had spent time with Yang Guo who tended to all her needs; what a contrast it was to the all the times she spent alone in the wild. As she thought about this, she sighed.

End of Chapter 22.

Chapter 23 - Sibling Rivalry

Translated by Noodles



The eagle was very big, yet uglier even than one's wildest imagination. Sparse feathers covered the eagle's entire body as if most of its feathers had been pulled off by somebody. The giant eagle had a big lump of skin, as red as blood, occupied the top of its head. The eagle strode about in big steps with its two extremely thick legs. There were probably thousands of bird species in the world, but Yang Guo had never seen any bird of prey as imposing and grand as this one.

It was past midnight, something woke Yang Guo. Chirrupings from an eagle came from the northwest. The chirrupings were somewhat croaked, bleak yet intense and lofty. Feeling very curious, he leapt off the rope bed gently and sought the direction of the sounds. The chirrupings would sometimes rise and sometimes stop, but they were much louder than the chirrupings of the two eagles on the Peach-Blossom Island. The path in front of him descended as he went forth and soon he found himself in a valley. The chirrupings weren't far from where he was. He crept forward on tiptoes and then quietly pushed aside the bushes in front of him. After a quick peek, he was astonished.

Right in front of Yang Guo's eyes stood a giant eagle. Taller than a human, yet uglier even than one's wildest imagination. Sparse feathers covered the eagle's entire body as if most of its feathers had been pulled off by somebody. The feathers were of a darkish yellow color, which made the eagle appear dirty. It did look somewhat similar to the two eagles on Peach-Blossom Island, but its ugliness made the difference as vast as from heaven to earth. The giant eagle had a hooked beak, and the big lump of skin, as red as blood, occupied the top of its head. There were probably thousands of bird species in the world, but Yang Guo had never seen any bird of prey as imposing and grand as this one. The eagle strode about in big steps with its two extremely thick legs. Sometimes it would extend its two short wings, so short that

one would wonder if the eagle was capable of flying. But the way it walked, with its head held high, certainly showed great power and grandeur.

After some more chirrups from the eagle, rustling sounds came from nearby, and suddenly, under the vivid moonlight, four poisonous snakes in bright colors shot at the ugly eagle like four arrows. The ugly eagle turned its head back and forth swiftly, and with four precise pecks, killed the four snakes instantly. The accuracy of the pecks and the speed it displayed were almost in match with first-class elite fighters in the Martial World.

Yang Guo was shocked by the magnificent skills the eagle had put on display. Immediately, his belittling thoughts turned into surprise and admiration. The ugly eagle opened its giant mouth and soon swallowed the four snakes.

"If I can catch this ugly eagle and put him next to Guo Fu's two eagles, I am sure this eagle would not be inferior to her's," Yang Guo muttered to himself quietly.

As he was pondering hard as to how to trap the eagle, a sudden stench caught his attention. Something poisonous and big must be close by.

The ugly eagle raised its head and chirped three times as if sending a signal of challenge to the hidden enemy. A loud whistling sound echoed as a giant serpent, as thick as the diameter of a bowl, and a triangle shaped head, emerged, hanging down from a big tree. And within a fraction of a second, the giant serpent had launched its attack viciously on the eagle. The ugly eagle didn't yield, but lunged forward instead. Thrusting its beak out, in a flash, the eagle had taken the poisonous giant serpent's right eye out. The eagle's neck looked short and thick, and it seemed as if it would have a hard time turning its head around, but the eagle shot the beak out and then retracted it back at

lightning speed. Yang Guo couldn't even tell how the eagle had blinded the giant serpent even though he had sharp eyes.

The giant poisonous serpent apparently experienced excruciating pain from losing its right eye. It opened its giant mouth wide and then clamped the huge jaws down hard, biting onto the big red lump on the ugly eagle's head. Yang Guo was astounded. He couldn't help but utter a cry of shock.

Excited by the success, the giant poisonous serpent let itself fall from the tree, and then wrapped its over-twenty-foot-long body around the ugly eagle tightly. It seemed that the ugly eagle was not going to get out alive this time. Not wishing to see the eagle die from the poisonous serpent's attack, Yang Guo sprang forward with his sword and hacked the blade toward the serpent's body. Suddenly, the eagle swung its right wing swiftly and smacked Yang Guo's right arm with tremendous force. Yang Guo was taken by complete surprise. His "Gentleman Sword" flew out of his grip and traveled dozens of feet in the air before falling back down to the ground. Dumbfounded, Yang Guo stared at the ongoing fight and saw the eagle pecking continuously at the serpent's back. Every peck would end up with blood spurting out of the wound like a small fountain.

"I guess you must be certain about your victory and don't want any help from me then!" Yang Guo thought.

The poisonous serpent squeezed tighter and tighter with its giant body. The ugly eagle's feathers almost stood up as it struggled to get out of its grip. Seeing that the eagle seemed to be losing the battle, Yang Guo picked up a large rock and smacked the serpent's body with it again and again. Feeling the pain, the giant serpent let lose its grip slightly and the ugly eagle suddenly reached out its beak and blinded the

serpent's left eye with a swift peck. The giant serpent opened its jaws wide and bit madly. Because both of its eyes were taken out, the bites were vicious but aimless. Its huge and poisonous fangs only struck thin air. The ugly eagle grabbed the serpent's neck with its talons and pressed it against the ground with all its weight. Meanwhile, its sharp beak never stopped pecking down hard on the serpent's head again and again. The serpent twisted and turned and slapped the ground hard with its giant body, trying to get out of the grip, but the eagle seemed to have endless strength and kept the serpent's head under his talons. After a long while, the serpent finally stopped twitching and lay still, dead.

The ugly eagle raised its head high and let out three loud chirps. Then it turned its head toward Yang Guo and chirruped in a much softer tone, as if it was calling out to him. Hearing the friendly chirrups from the eagle, Yang Guo walked slowly near the eagle. "Brother Eagle, your strength is incredible! It's very impressive!" he cheered.

The ugly eagle answered with some more soft chirrups. Slowly, it walked next to Yang Guo and then patted him on the shoulder gently with its left wing. Seeing how smart and unusual the eagle was, Yang Guo was very pleased, so he also patted the eagle gently on its back.

The ugly eagle let out some more chirrups in low pitches. Holding the corner of Yang Guo's shirt in its beak, the eagle pulled a couple of times before letting lose its grip and started walking away in big strides. Yang Guo knew the eagle wanted him to follow, so he tagged along. The ugly eagle's legs moved so swiftly that its speed was no slower than a galloping horse. Yang Guo had to use his Qing-Gong techniques in order to keep up with it. He couldn't help feeling very impressed inwardly. The path the eagle took descended lower and lower. Soon, Yang Guo found himself inside a deep valley. After walking continuously for another

good while, they came to the entrance of a big cave. The ugly eagle nodded its head three times with three chirrups as if it was saluting toward the cave. Then it turned its head to stare at Yang Guo.

“There must be some kind of a hermit Master who lives in the cave. Then of course the giant eagle must be a tamed pet of his. I must show my respect,” Yang Guo thought to himself. So he knelt down in front of the cave and kowtowed.

“Yang Guo hereby shows his respect to a Senior Master. Please forgive me for disturbing your peace,” he said and then waited. But no one answered from inside the cave.

The eagle pulled Yang Guo’s shirt again and then walked inside the cave. Yang Guo stared at the dark cave in front of him, not knowing if there was really an elite Kung Fu Master inside or some kind of goblins or demons. Feeling a bit uneasy and anxious, he decided to give no thoughts to his own safety and followed it in.

The cave was actually not deep at all. Only about thirty feet into the cave, they had already reached the end. Other than a table and a bench made out of stones, there was nothing inside the cave. The ugly eagle chirped again, signaling toward a corner of the cave. Casting a glance toward the corner, Yang Guo saw a pile of rocks and stones of all shapes and sizes jumbled together. It looked like a grave.

“This must be the grave of a lofty hermit. Too bad the eagle doesn’t know how to speak and can’t tell me more about him,” Yang Guo thought aloud.

He looked up and then something caught his attention. The rock wall seemed to have some words written on it. But thick dust and moss almost covered the entire rock wall, and it was hard to tell what words they were in the dark. Lighting a dry stick, Yang Guo wiped the moss off with his hand, and not to

his surprise, three lines of words appeared. The strokes of the words were thin but were carved into the rock wall very deeply. It seemed that the words were carved using a very sharp blade. The three lines said:

“Having roamed the martial world for more than thirty years, I have killed all my villainous foes and defeated all heroic champions. There’s no one who can be my equal under the same sky. Without any other challengers, I could only retreat to this deep valley, living a hermit’s life in seclusion, with only an eagle as my companion. Alas, throughout my life I searched for a match in vain. Unbearable loneliness is my destiny.” The signature at the bottom was, “Demonic Swordsman Dugu Seeking-A-Loss.”

Yang Guo read the three lines back and forth. Astonishment and deep admiration filled his heart. He could clearly feel the sadness and loneliness behind the words. Because there was no match for him in the entire world, this lofty Master had come to live a hermit’s life in seclusion in this deep valley. His understanding of martial arts must have reached the ultimate level. His title was “Demonic Swordsman,” then his skills in sword arts must have been miraculous. And his name was “Seeking-A-Loss,” then he must have traveled all over the world looking for someone who could defeat him, but all his efforts were in vain and he eventually passed away in great disappointment. His imagination filled his mind with thoughts of how the Sword Master had roamed the martial world; Yang Guo was lost in thought.

A long while passed before Yang Guo finally got hold of himself again. Holding the burning stick, he searched around in the cave, but failed to find anything else related to the sword Master. The grave made out of a pile of rocks and stones didn’t have any sign or tombstone on it. He figured that after the sword Master passed away, it must have been the Divine Eagle that had picked all the rocks and stones and

piled them on top of the Sword Master's dead body. Feeling his admiration growing larger and larger, Yang Guo couldn't help but kneel in front of the grave and kowtow. The Divine Eagle seemed to be pleased to see him show great respect towards the grave and gently patted him on the shoulder a couple of times.

"The sword Master Dugu had called the eagle a companion. Then even though the eagle is an animal, it really is a Senior of mine. It would be very appropriate if I call him Brother Eagle," Yang Guo thought to himself. So he said, "Brother Eagle, it must be fate that has brought us together. I need to leave now. Would you like to go with me or would you rather stay here guarding Sword Master Dugu's grave?"

The divine eagle answered with some chirrups. Yang Guo couldn't understand what the eagle had said, but seeing that the eagle stayed by the side of the grave, he thought, "The many Senior Masters I've met in the martial world never mentioned somebody named Dugu Seeking-A-Loss. He must have been someone who existed sixty or seventy years ago. The Divine Eagle had lived here for a long time and became attached to it. Of course he would rather stay than leaving with me." He put his arms around the Divine Eagle's neck and stroked its feathers gently. Then he walked out of the cave.

Throughout his life, other than the intimate relationship he had with Xiao Longnu, he didn't have any other closer friends. Now he met the Divine Eagle; although the eagle was only an animal, he really felt a close relationship, and was reluctant to part with him. After every couple of steps, he would turn and cast a glance back. And every time he turned around, the Divine Eagle would also answer with a loud chirp. Although the two of them were soon hundreds of feet apart, the Divine Eagle could still see him clearly in the dark and chirped every time Yang Guo turned his head back.

Suddenly, Yang Guo's heart burned with indignation. He shouted out loud, "Brother Eagle, I don't have much life left in me. After I take care of the business regarding Uncle Guo's baby daughter and after I bid my farewell to my aunty, I will come back here. If I get to be buried next to Great Hero Dugu, then my life wouldn't have been a waste of time after all." He bowed and then headed out in big strides.

He was worried about the safety of Guo Jing's daughter so he gathered his sword and hurried back to the cave. As soon as he got back to the cave, Li Mochou said, "Where have you been? There's some kind of damn annoying ghost around here."

Yang Guo said, "What ghosts?" As soon as he finished, he could hear a distant cry.

Yang Guo was taken aback by this and said quietly, "Martial Uncle Li, look after the baby, I'll take care of this."

The cries were getting closer and closer until distinct words could be made out, "What a tragic life I lead...what a tragic life I lead! My wife has been killed and now my own two sons are trying to kill each other." Under the starlight, Yang Guo could see a large, scruffy man stumbling around, sobbing with his hands over his face. He could not see his face clearly.

Li Mochou said, "So it's a madman. Send him away; don't let him wake the baby."

The man continued to sob, "I only have two sons and yet these two sons of mine have decided to fight with each other, what is there left for me to live for?" He gave out a long sorrowful howl.

Yang Guo remembered something and thought, "Could it be him?" He walked out of the cave slowly and said, "Is that senior Wu?"

This person had come all the way out here in the middle of the night because he wanted to let all his emotions out; he had not expected that anyone would be out here as well. As soon as he heard Yang Guo's voice, he immediately controlled himself and shouted, "Who are you? What are you doing sneaking around here?"

Yang Guo said, "My name is Yang Guo. Is Senior's surname Wu with first name Santong?"

This person was indeed Wu Santong. After being injured by Li Mochou's silver needles in Jiaxing, he fell unconscious. By the time he came round, he saw his wife crouching above him and she was sucking the poison from the wound above his left eye. He was shocked and said, "Sanliang, the venom of this poison is lethal, how can you suck it out?" He quickly pushed her away. Wu Sanliang spat out a mouthful of blood on the ground and smiled, "The blood has now become red again; you should be alright."

Wu Santong saw that her cheeks were purple and was extremely alarmed. He trembled, "Sanliang, you... you..."

Wu Sanliang knew that by saving her husband, she would die immediately afterwards; she stroked the heads of her two sons and said, "I know that you have been unhappy for as long as we've been married. It's too late to correct the mistake now; all I'm asking is that you take care of our children and watch them grow into men, teach them brotherly love and friendship..." She could no longer finish her words.

After this shock, his madness came back on him once more. As he watched his two sons crying over the body of their dead mother, his mind became blank and he left them as they were. He roamed the realm in this state of confusion for many years, but as time went on, his mind became clearer. After the Heroes' Feast, Sishui Yuyin left with a few friends of

the Jianghu world and as they conversed, talk of a particular character whose description matched his martial brother Wu Santong came up. He went in search of this man and eventually came across his martial brother.

When he heard that his two sons were at Xiangyang, Wu Santong was filled with joy and immediately made his way there. He arrived just after the great battle with Fawang. Guo Jing was still injured and Huang Rong had just given birth. After meeting with Zhu Ziliu and Guo Fu, he found out that his two sons were actually fighting with each other outside the city. Memories of his wife's last request came back to him and he was filled with sorrow. He immediately left the city to look for them. He passed a run down temple and heard the clashing of weapons from within. After taking a peak inside, he saw Wu Dunru and Wu Xiuwen in battle with each other. At first, he wasn't able to recognize his now grown up sons but soon after seeing the two using a sword in their right hands and the "Solitary Yang Finger" with the left to seal the other's pressure points, he knew they were his sons and immediately jumped in and ordered them to stop.

The two were of course delighted to be reunited with their father but as soon as the name Guo Fu came up, the tension between the two flared up once again. No matter what Wu Santong said or tried to stop the fighting over Guo Fu, nothing worked. The two of them did not dare to argue in front of their father but whenever he was out of sight, the two bickered once more. They then arranged a meeting that night to have a duel to decide this matter once and for all. Wu Santong had overheard them and decided to get to their meeting place first to stop them. The more he thought about this situation the more depressed he got and he could no longer help himself and had to let it all out. Just at this time, a young man popped out from a cave, his natural reaction was one of wariness and he shouted, "Who are you? How do you know my name?"

After hearing that this man was indeed Wu Santong, Yang Guo replied, "Uncle Wu, my name is Yang Guo, I used to live on Peach Blossom Island with your sons in Hero Guo's residence; I have always admired Uncle Wu's name."

Wu Santong nodded and said, "What are you doing here? Ah, that's it, Dunru and Xiuwen have arranged to duel here and you've come to officiate. Huh, you're supposedly a friend to them, why haven't you tried to stop them? Instead, you're here to egg them on, what kind of friend are you?" By now, his voice was becoming shouts and yells as he vented all his anger on Yang Guo. He cursed as he advanced forward with a raised palm, wanting to teach this troublemaker of a youngster a lesson.

Yang Guo knew what he wanted to do by his body language and thought there wasn't a need to get into a fight with him, so he took two steps back and smiled, "I didn't know that the Wu's had arranged a duel here, you cannot accuse me falsely."

Wu Santong shouted, "You are still trying to deny it? If you didn't know about this then why the hell are you here? Of all the places you could be, why have you turned up in this particular place?"

Yang Guo thought what an unreasonable fellow but this meeting was indeed quite a coincidence; he was lost for words as he searched for a reply.

When Wu Santong saw his hesitation, he was convinced that Yang Guo was up to no good. When he was younger, love wasn't kind to him and because of this, every time he saw a handsome young man, he would feel a bit of revulsion towards them. He thought, "This kid might not even know who my sons are, he must be up to no good sneaking around here like this." He did not give it any more thought as his anger took over. He raised his right palm and struck

downwards towards Yang Guo's shoulder. Yang Guo shifted his body leaving the palm striking thin air but Wu Santong immediately followed with an elbow. Yang Guo saw that his stances were very powerful so he did not dare to take it easy; he slanted his body and moved his feet, avoiding another stance.

Wu Santong called out, "Not bad kid, your lightness kung fu is pretty good. Now raise your sword and attack!"

At this time, the baby in the cave suddenly woke up and started to cry. Yang Guo thought, "Martial Uncle Li killed his wife, if the two see each other, it'll surely get ugly. If those two fight, each stance will be a fatal strike; it will not be easy for me to protect the baby in that situation." So he smiled, "Uncle Wu, how can junior exchange stances with a person of your stature? But since you've got it in your mind that I'm up to no good then I'm left with no choice. How about this, I'll let you have three stances to attack. If you don't kill me within these three stances, then you'll have to leave this place. Agreed?"

Wu Santong was furious and shouted, "You arrogant punk, I held back on that last palm and have yet to use my best skills, how dare you look down on me?"

His right index finger suddenly stretched out and used the "Solitary Yang Finger". He had trained this skill for many years and had profound internal energy. Yang Guo saw his index finger moving around and though it was coming at him at a fairly slow speed, all the major pressure points of his upper body were covered within the finger's range leaving him guessing which pressure point was being targeted. As he was trying to figure it out, he realized all nine of his major pressure points were being threatened. He immediately flicked out his index finger and used Huang Yaoshi's "Divine Release of the Flicking Finger".

The “Divine Release of the Flicking Finger” and the “Solitary Yang Finger” have been famous in the Jianghu world for years. Both have their virtues, but Yang Guo’s internal energy was shallow. He’d learned it in a very short space of time and had yet to train it diligently. How could it match the years that Wu Santong put into his skill? As soon as the two fingers touched, Yang Guo’s right arm trembled and his whole body got hot. He staggered back five or six paces and had to hold himself up with a tree stump to keep from falling over.

Wu Santong said, “This kid has indeed lived on Peach Blossom Island.” Out of respect for Huang Yaoshi and out of admiration for his martial arts talent that could actually block this attack at such a young age, he called out, “The second finger is coming, if you can’t take it then don’t force yourself to, I won’t take your life.” As he said this, he advanced forward a few more steps and once again stretched out his finger; this time, Yang Guo’s abdomen was targeted.

This time, even more major pressure points were targeted; the twelve major pressure points of the surging channel, the ‘Free Gate’, ‘Open Valley’, low to mid ‘Pillar’, ‘Fourfold Fullness’, the ‘Pubic Bone’, ‘Meeting of Yin’, all of these places were under the threat of the finger. Yang Guo saw that the incoming force of the finger was extremely quick, if he tried to use the “Divine Release of the Flicking Finger” again, his finger would probably break. His innards will be at risk as well so he immediately used the stance “Clearing of the Zither’s Heart”; a light swooshing sound was produced as he unsheathed the Gentleman Sword and protected the area two inches away from his abdomen. Wu Santong quickly took his finger back from the threat of the blade and sent out a third finger. This attack came out like lightning and the finger aimed for the spot between Yang Guo’s eyes. He thought that Yang Guo surely would not be able to block this attack with his sword. Yang Guo knew that it would be difficult to neutralize such a fast attack so he quickly used a

move from the “Nine Yin Manual”. He crouched down and darted forward between Wu Santong’s legs. Though this move was swift and agile, it looked quite pathetic and using it makes the user lose face; but luckily for Yang Guo, he was a junior so there wasn’t much shame in using it.

Before Wu Santong could say ‘Damn’, he felt Yang Guo patting him on his shoulder before hearing him say, “Uncle, that third finger was very powerful.”

With this shock, he lowered his hands and moved away before saying with gloominess, “Well, it looks there really are heroes amongst the young; there’s no more use for an old man like me anymore.”

Yang Guo quickly sheathed his sword and bowed to him. He said, “That last stance was extremely unsightly, if that were a real duel, it would be a loss for me.”

Wu Santong felt a bit better and sighed, “There’s no need for that, if you had attacked me from behind, I’d have no chance of surviving. It was a very clever move, an old and dumb man such as I can’t compete with smart youngsters such as you...” Before he could finish, the sounds of footsteps could be heard; there were two people coming towards them. Yang Guo tugged at Wu Santong’s sleeve and the two hid behind a bush. The footsteps were gradually becoming louder and louder; the two people that had come were indeed Wu Dunru and Wu Xiuwen.

Wu Xiuwen stopped and took a look around before saying, “Brother, it’s wide open here, let’s pick this spot.”

Wu Dunru said, “Fine!” He didn’t like talking much. Swoosh; he drew his sword.

However Wu Xiuwen did not draw his sword, he said, “Brother, if I can’t beat you today, and even if you don’t kill

me, I won't be able to live. Remember the three major tasks you have to do; get revenge for our mother's death, look after father and love and protect sister Fu."

When Wu Santong heard these words, tear rolled from his eyes.

Wu Dunru said, "We all know this, why talk? If you beat me, the same applies." He raised his sword and took an open stance.

Wu Xiuwen still did not draw his sword and took a few steps forward before saying, "Brother, we lost our mother when we were young and our father left us; we have always relied on each other and never argued, but now that it's come to this; you don't blame me do you?"

Wu Dunru said, "Brother, it's fate, none of us decided this."

Wu Xiuwen said, "No matter who lives or who dies, this secret can never be revealed to prevent grief for father and sister Fu." Wu Dunru nodded and held his brother's left hand. The brothers looked at each other in silence.

When Wu Santong heard how deep their brotherly bond was, he was deeply comforted. He was about to jump out to stop them from doing anything stupid, when suddenly, they both called out, "Let's start!" Both jumped backwards at the same time. Wu Xiuwen stretched out his hand and unsheathed his sword; three swift strokes were unleashed. Wu Dunru parried the first two strokes and blocked the third before replying with two stances of his own, both of them aimed to strike Wu Xiuwen down. Wu Santong's heart jumped when he saw this but Wu Xiuwen moved his body and leaped to the side, easily avoiding the attacks.

Sounds of clashing weapons echoed throughout the valley as the two brothers fought a duel to the death. Wu Santong was

worried but also sad at the same time; he loved his sons with his life and loved them equally. With the two fighting so viciously it was as if they were fighting their sworn enemies; one of them would come to harm sooner or later. If he came out now and told them to stop, the two would stop the fight; but if things don't end today, then it will continue on tomorrow and he can't always be there to watch over them. The more he watched the greater the pain he felt as he thought about how tragic his life was, tears again fell from his eyes.

When they were younger Yang Guo did not get on with the Wu brothers, and after meeting again, there was still some animosity. He was a stubborn fellow and wasn't the most forgiving. When he first saw the Wu brothers fighting, he had hoped that something would happen to them; but after seeing the anguish that Wu Santong was suffering, he thought about the little time that he had left and his compassionate side surfaced. "I haven't done much good in my life; after I die, Gu Gu will obviously be upset but apart from her, only Cheng Ying, Lu Wushuang and Gongsun Lu'E will remember me. Why don't I do something good today and let this old man remember my virtues?" He made his mind up and whispered in Wu Santong's ears, "Uncle Wu, I have a plan to stop your sons from fighting."

Wu Santong turned his tearful face around and gratitude filled eyes looked back at him. However, he was not sure how Yang Guo was going to stop his sons from fighting.

Yang Guo said quietly, "I hope that uncle will not be offended when your sons are humbled."

Wu Santong could not express his thanks and just held Yang Guo's hands tightly. Wu Santong did not experience much love when he was younger, his marriage was arranged by his parents and because of his struggles with love, he was

unable to find peace. After his wife sacrificed her life for him, he began to appreciate his wife more and the feelings that he had for He Yuanjun gradually faded. The only thing that he cared about now was his sons; if he could keep them safe from harm, he would gladly trade his own life for them. Hearing these words from Yang Guo in such a desperate situation as this was like suddenly meeting the Goddess of Mercy in times of difficulty.

When Yang Guo saw his expression, he couldn't stop his heart from aching as he thought, "If my father was still alive, he would definitely love me as much as Wu Santong loved his sons." He whispered, "Don't let them know you are here otherwise my plan won't work."

The duel between the Wu brothers was becoming more and more heated. Both of them were using the "Yue Maiden Swordplay". This skill belonged to Han Xiaoying of the Seven Freaks of Jiangnan. The two had practiced and trained this swordplay countless times over the years but this time, it was not a sparring session; it was a life and death duel where one mistake would be fatal.

Yang Guo watched them for a while and thought, "Uncle Guo's martial arts reign supreme but it appears that his students have not absorbed these skills. With the Wu brother's martial arts talents plainly ordinary, I don't think they have learned even twenty percent of Uncle Guo's martial arts." He suddenly laughed out loud and slowly walked out.

The Wu Brothers leapt back in shock and pointed their swords in the direction of the laugh. When they saw that it was Yang Guo, they both shouted at the same time, "What are you doing here?"

Yang Guo laughed, "What are you doing here?"

Wu Xiuwen gave a laugh and said, "We both felt bored tonight so we've come out here to practice our swordplay."

Yang Guo thought, "Little Wu is pretty alert, he's acting as if nothing was happening." He chuckled, "Practicing so hard that you don't have a care for your life? How hard working you two are."

Wu Dunru yelled, "Go, this is none of your business."

Yang Guo chuckled, "If you guys were really just working hard practicing, of course it wouldn't be my business. But between every stance you are unleashing, you are filled of thoughts for my sister Fu, if this is none of my business then whose business is it?"

Yang Guo's words of 'my sister Fu' pierced the brothers' hearts, leaving their bodies shaking and swords quivering.

Wu Xiuwen roared, "What the hell are you saying?"

Yang Guo said, "Isn't Sister Fu Uncle and Auntie Guo's daughter? Don't the parents arrange a marriage? Uncle Guo betrothed her to me a long time ago; you guys know about this but yet here you are, fighting over my fiancée, what kind of person do you take me for?"

His tone was becoming more and more serious as he said this and he left the brothers speechless. They both knew that Guo Jing had always wanted to marry his daughter to him but Huang Rong and Guo Fu had always disliked Yang Guo. When the two's thoughts were revealed by Yang Guo, they could only glance at each other and didn't know how to reply.

Wu Xiuwen was again alert in urgent times and chuckled, "Huh, betrothed? Only you would say a thing like that! Has there been an agreement between the matchmakers? Has the engagement been stamped down on paper?"

Yang Guo replied, "Okay, so both of you brothers have had the permission of your parents and the agreement from your matchmakers I take it."

Custom was extremely important during this time; marriages must have the agreement of parents and the matchmakers. The two brothers had assumed that after one of them loses, only the winner will go back to Guo Fu leaving with her with no choice. She'll definitely agree to the proposal leaving just the task of convincing the Guo couple to agree. They were not prepared for this meddling from Yang Guo.

Wu Xiuwen took a second to think before replying, "It might be true that Master wants to betroth sister Fu to you. But Master wife has planned to betroth her to one of us. The three of us are in the same boat, none of us can truly say their claim is right, it looks like sister Fu's future is going to be complicated."

Yang Guo laughed at the sky.

Wu Xiuwen snapped when he saw that Yang Guo was laughing loudly non-stop without saying anything and said, "What are you laughing at? Are my words wrong?"

Yang Guo laughed, "Wrong, so wrong. Uncle Guo loves me, Auntie Guo loves me even more, how can you two compete with me?"

Wu Xiuwen said, "Huh, who's going to believe your words?"

Yang Guo laughed, "Why should I lie? Auntie Guo long ago agreed to this marriage, otherwise, why would I risk my life to save them if they weren't my in-laws? It's all because of sister Fu. Tell me, has your Master wife ever promised you they'll betroth their daughter to you?"

The two brothers looked at each other with alarm, their Master wife has indeed not said a single word about this

matter, not even hinted that she'll say something about it; could it be that she has indeed agreed to betroth her daughter to this punk? The two brothers were having a duel to the death with each other; but with this sudden appearance of a common enemy, they both moved closer towards one another.

Yang Guo had heard their conversation with Guo Fu earlier on and wanted to make the two jealous so he smiled, "Sister Fu said to me; 'Those two brothers are annoying me to death', and she couldn't discourage you guys so she said that she liked both of you. Tell me, is there a virtuous girl who'll say she loves two people at once? My sister Fu is more than virtuous, so of course she'd never do a thing like this. Let me make it clear for you; when she says that she likes both of you, she's actually saying that she doesn't like either." He then impersonated Guo Fu's voice on that night and said, "Little brother Wu, you've told me a thousand times, a million times how you feel about me, I already know. Don't you know how hard it is for me? You are always weird like this, what do you want to say to me?"

The brothers' faces turned red. Those words were said by each of them to Guo Fu with no one else around; if she didn't tell Yang Guo, how would he know about it? The two of them felt their hearts' breaking, both thinking that Guo Fu has refused all along to agree to marry them because of this.

When Yang Guo saw their faces, he knew that his plan had worked, he put on a serious face and said, "Look, sister Fu is my fiancée, we're going to stay married for years to come, we'll have sons, daughters, grand children and all..." At this point, a long quiet sigh came from behind; it was Xiao Longnu's voice.

Yang Guo called out, "Gu Gu!" But there was no reply; he immediately thought that Li Mochou had made this sigh and

that person cannot meet the Wu family at all so he said loudly, "If you two continue to act like this, people will only laugh at you. In respect of my in-laws, I'll forget about this matter. You two better go back to Xiangyang and help my in-laws guard the city." He was actually calling the Guo couple his in-laws.

The Wu brothers were now despondent and were now holding each other's arms. Wu Xiuwen said gloomily, "Fine, brother Yang, I wish you and apprentice sister Fu... a long and prosperous life. We'll leave this place for somewhere else; we'll disappear from the world." The two of them turned to leave.

Yang Guo was feeling pleased with himself; the two brothers were still as angry as ever at him but now they'll hate Guo Fu. The two brothers' relationship will now be stronger than ever after this; their father's wishes will at least be fulfilled.

Wu Santong was listening from the bushes and when he heard that Yang Guo had convinced his sons to stop fighting, he was overwhelmed with delight; as he saw his sons walking away, he couldn't stop himself from calling out, "Wen'er, Ru'er, let's leave together."

The two brothers were slightly startled when they heard their father's voice and both replied, "Father."

Wu Santong bowed deeply to Yang Guo and said, "Brother Yang, I will never forget your kindness."

Yang Guo frowned; how could he say this in front of the brothers? By the time he wanted to say something to throw them off the scent, Wu Xiuwen had become suspicious and said, "Brother, that punk's words may not be the truth."

Wu Dunru may not be as articulate as his brother, but he was just as alert; he looked at his father and then nodded to his

brother.

Wu Santong had saw that he had made a mess of things and quickly said, "It's not what you think, I did not get brother Yang to stop you fighting."

At first, the Wu brothers were just suspicious, but after hearing their father trying to cover up his words, they both immediately thought about how Yang Guo and Guo Fu had never gotten on with each other. He and Xiao Longnu were deeply in love, so the things that he had just said were most probably lies.

Wu Xiuwen said, "Brother, we'll go back to Xiangyang and ask sister Fu about this."

Wu Dunru replied, "Yes! We can't be deceived by other people's lies."

Wu Xiuwen said, "Father, come with us as well. Master and Master wife are your old friends, you should go see them."

Wu Santong replied, "I... I..." He became flustered as he tried to decide what to do. He wanted to use his authority to order his sons to stop fighting but was afraid that they'll just agree to please him and then go off fighting as soon as his back was turned.

Yang Guo said coldly, "Little brother Wu, how can you say the words 'sister Fu'? From now on, not only can't you say it, you're not allowed to even think it."

Wu Xiuwen yelled, "What, this from the world's most unreasonable person? I have said the words 'sister Fu' for years now; not only do I want to say it today, I want to say it tomorrow. Sister Fu, sister Fu, my sister Fu..." Suddenly, smack! Yang Guo slapped his left cheek.

Wu Xiuwen leaped back two steps and held up his sword. He lowered his voice and said, "Fine, the one named Yang, it's been a few years since we've had a fight."

Wu Santong shouted, "Wen'er, why start a fight?"

Yang Guo turned to him and said with a serious face, "Uncle Wu, who exactly are you trying to help?" Logically, he would of course help his son, but it was clear to see that Yang Guo was trying to help him stop his sons from fighting, his mouth froze.

Yang Guo said, "How about this, go and sit over there. I won't hurt them and more likely than not, they won't be able to harm me; just watch the show."

He was a lot younger than Wu Santong but as he said this, Wu Santong couldn't stop himself from complying with his instructions and he sat down on a rock.

Yang Guo unsheathed his Gentleman Sword and chopped a large Pine tree at his side in two. He pushed out his left palm and toppled the top half of the tree. The sword left a straight and smooth cut. When the brothers saw how fine a weapon his sword was, they couldn't help but to look at each other in shock.

Yang Guo returned the sword in its sheath and laughed, "Do you think you are worthy of fighting against this sword?" He casually stretched out his hand and snapped a branch. He removed the leaves and left himself with a three-foot long wooden rod. He said to them, "I know that you don't believe that my mother-in-law favors me. How about this, I'll use this wooden rod and you two use your swords against me at the same time. You can use the martial arts that my father and mother-in-law taught you, or you can use the "Solitary Yang Finger" that your Martial Uncle Zhu taught you. I however, will only use the martial arts that my mother-in-law has

taught me; if I use a stance from another sect's martial arts then that means I've lost."

The brothers had been worried about how good his martial arts were; they had seen him in action twice against Jinlun Fawang and the stances that he had used were completely new to them. But with Yang Guo referring to Guo Jing and Huang Rong as his in-laws as if he had already married Guo Fu, how could they not get angry? Also, Yang Guo was being too arrogant and insulting towards them. Two against one with a wooden rod against swords and limiting himself to using only martial arts that Huang Rong had taught him. With these advantages, if they don't win then it would be a disgrace.

Wu Dunru felt that this wasn't fair and shook his head. He was about to say something when Wu Xiuwen said, "Fine, you were the one who made the rules; it wasn't we brothers who asked for it. Should you happen to use a stance of the Quanzhen or Ancient Tomb martial arts what then?" He was thinking that although this punk's martial arts were good, it was only because he had learned the advanced techniques of the Quanzhen and the Ancient Tomb. When we were living on Peach Blossom Island, we beat the hell out of you and you had to run away, how good were you then? He said these words so that the two of them could fight him together.

Yang Guo said, "We are fighting today not because of old grudges or today's feud, we are fighting because of sister Fu. If I lose, just one word or glance at her then I'm a worthless and shameless scoundrel." These words were meant to force the brothers to say the same thing.

Wu Xiuwen could only say, "If we lose, then we too won't see sister Fu again."

Yang Guo faced Wu Dunru and said, "What about you?"

Wu Dunru said angrily, "My brother and I share the same view, what else am I going to say?"

Yang Guo laughed, "Fine, if you lose today and you don't keep to your promise, then you are a worthless, shameless scoundrel, yes?"

Wu Xiuwen said, "Correct. The same applies to you. Let's start!" He stretched his sword forward and aimed for Yang Guo's leg. Wu Dunru attacked at the same time but he came in from the left. Within a stance, the two had moved themselves into the pincer position.

Yang Guo leapt forward and called out, "You brothers are pretty powerful when you fight together."

Wu Dunru attacked again and Yang Guo raised his wooden rod but he did not counterattack, instead he just moved left and right and said, "A wife is like a piece of clothing, brothers are like limbs, if a piece of clothing is torn it can be mended but if limbs snap, there's no return! Have you heard this poem before?"

Wu Xiuwen shouted, "What are you babbling on about? Why aren't you showing us the martial arts that Master wife taught you?" Wu Dunru did not say a word as he fought harder.

Yang Guo said, "Fine, you better watch out, here comes the masterful martial arts that my mother-in-law personally taught me!" He then aimed his wooden rod downwards and used the 'trip' codex from the "Dog Beating Stick Technique". At the same time, he stretched out his left index finger and pretended to go for Wu Dunru's pressure point. Wu Dunru leapt back to avoid this attack. Wu Xiuwen called out as he was tripped.

When Wu Dunru saw that his brother was in trouble, he raised his sword and quickly attacked Yang Guo.

Yang Guo said, "That's right, brothers should share the same fortune." The wooden rod became a blur and within the blink of an eye, the rod was behind him and poked him on the behind. The wooden rod appeared to turn around in a clumsy fashion but the position it came from was one that the opponent had no chance of guessing. The "Dog Beating Stick Technique" is mystifying and unpredictable, not even a ghost or god can guess where it'll end up. Though Wu Dunru didn't feel much from this attack, he had already lost a stance to him and on the inside; he was starting to get worried.

Wu Xiuwen leapt up from the ground and called out, "That's the "Dog Beating Stick Technique", when did Master wife teach you that? You only learned a few stances when we watched in secret as Master wife was teaching Lu Youjiao, how does that count?"

Yang Guo stretched out his wooden rod and tripped him up once again, this time throwing him forwards. Wu Dunru slashed across to protect his brother.

Yang Guo waited until Wu Xiuwen picked himself up from the ground before laughing, "We both watched at the same time yet how come I know how to use it but you don't? My mother-in-law was only teaching Lu Youjiao the codex that time, she taught me the stances personally. Even my sister Fu doesn't know how to use it, how would you know?"

Wu Xiuwen didn't know that Yang Guo had learned the techniques from Hong Qigong during the battle between Hong Qigong and Ouyang Feng. Wu Xiuwen was thinking what Yang Guo said was most probably true, otherwise how come he was able to use the technique after just once listening to the codex, while he himself couldn't even understand a single point but he still argued, "That's

because each one's character is different. Only the Beggar Clan Leader can use the stick technique, we only accidentally overheard it, without Master wife's permission, how can we learn it in secret? Only shameless scoundrels would hold onto what they've heard. You're shameless; others will mock you."

Yang Guo laughed out loud. The wooden rod made two noises as it poked the backs of the two brothers. The brothers leapt away with red faces. Yang Guo laughed, "Since I haven't got any evidence at the moment and though I may have used the "Dog Beating Stick Technique" to defeat you, you guys will not accept defeat. Fine, I'll let you experience another martial art that my mother-in-law taught me." He looked at big Wu and then at little Wu before asking, "My mother-in-law's martial arts, who taught them to her?"

Wu Xiuwen said angrily, "Mother in-law this, father in-law that, you're shameless, we're not going to speak to you anymore."

Yang Guo let out a laugh and said, "Why are you so bad tempered? Fine, let me ask you, before your Master wife entered the tutelage of Hong Qigong, who taught her martial arts?"

Wu Xiuwen said, "My Master wife is the daughter of Lord Huang of Peach Blossom Island, her martial arts were taught by Lord Huang, who doesn't know about this?"

Yang Guo said, "That's right. You guys have lived on Peach Blossom Island for many years; do you know what the greatest skills of Lord Huang are?"

Wu Xiuwen said, "Lord Huang's knowledge is vast and wide, he's versed in all, you can't distinguish what a great skill is and a great skill isn't."

Yang Guo said, "You are right there. When it comes to swordplay, what technique does Lord Huang use?"

Wu Xiuwen, "Why the questions when you are already know the answer? Lord Huang's "Jade Flute Swordplay" is peerless in the world of Wulin, it is famed throughout the land, and everyone in the world of Jianghu knows this."

Yang Guo said, "Have you ever seen Lord Huang before?"

Wu Xiuwen said, "Lord Huang is drifting through the lands, he is in one place one moment and gone the next, even Master and Master wife cannot find him, what chance have we juniors of meeting him?"

Yang Guo said, "Have you seen senior's "Jade Flute Swordplay" before?"

Wu Xiuwen gave out a cold laugh and said, "One year when it was Lord Huang's birthday, Master wife dedicated a feast in his honour and after the feast, she performed the swordplay once. My brother and I along with sister Fu saw it with our very own eyes. By that time, brother Yang was in the tutelage of Quanzhen sect."

Yang Guo smiled, "That's right. Later on, my mother-in-law... my mother-in-law taught me the "Jade Flute Swordplay" in secret."

The Wu brothers looked at each other in disbelief, they were thinking that although that Yang Guo had entered Huang Rong's tutelage, all she had taught him was reading and writing, she did not teach him any martial arts. It was because of this that he was not a match for them in the fight they had on the island. They had heard from Grandpa Ke that the final push that he did on Wu Xiuwen was Ouyang Feng's "Toad Stance". The "Jade Flute Swordplay" is complicated and ingenious, even though Guo Fu was Huang Rong's

daughter, she was not taught it even to this day. Since Yang Guo returned from Mount Zhongnan, the meetings that he had with Huang Rong were brief, even if their Master wife wanted to teach him this swordplay, she may not have found time to.

Yang Guo swept his wooden rod lightly and called out, "Watch out, this stance is called "The Flute's Notion to a Dragon"!" Using the rod as a sword, the rod suddenly straightened and thud, the rod struck Wu Dunru on the right side of his chest. If the wooden rod were a sharp sword, the sword would have gone through him taking his life.

Wu Xiuwen was alert and quickly attacked with his sword, attacking Yang Guo's right side but he was still too slow, Yang Guo's wooden rod had turned around and suddenly pierced towards his right side. This stance started second but finished first, Wu Xiuwen's wrist would have been struck by the rod before his sword reached his opponent. If that happened he would surely be disarmed. He quickly changed his stance, pulling his waist in and taking his sword back, as he kicked out with his left leg. However, Yang Guo's rod was now going towards Wu Dunru's shoulder; the rod moved and so did Yang Guo, displaying attack and defense at the same time, avoiding Wu Xiuwen's kick without dodging. Wu Xiuwen's kick hit thin air while Wu Dunru's situation became dire; he used his sword and defended tightly to avoid any more blows to his body.

Within a few more stances, both brothers were struggling; even if they defended with their lives it wouldn't be enough, how would they even have time to try to cut the wooden rod?

Yang Guo called out the stances, "The Clear Tone Away from the Mountain", "Gold Ringing and Jade Resonating", "The Long Call of the Phoenix Song", "The Sound Across the Stage", "The Flowing of the Boat's Song" The wooden rod

attacked continuously, graceful and flowing with every stance an offensive one; before the Wu brothers could neutralize a stance, out came a second, a third and so on. He pierced and slashed with the wooden rod and forced the Wu brothers to defend together and they did not dare to take a step away from each other. When the Wu brothers saw Huang Rong performing the swordplay, they didn't ponder much on it and thought that this handsome and graceful swordplay was only used for show. How would they know that it could be used in such ingenious ways? The stances that Yang Guo called out were the same as the ones that Huang Rong had called out when she was performing the swordplay. With their swords under someone's control and struggling to respond, their spirits were dampened further and both of them were now convinced that Huang Rong had taught Yang Guo this "Jade Flute Swordplay". How would they know that Yang Guo had spent many days with Huang Yaoshi and had his personal tutoring of the "Jade Flute Swordplay" and the "Divine Release of the Flicking Finger"?

When Yang Guo saw their miserable expressions, he felt slightly bad about it but he remembered that he must see this through to the end. If he didn't convince them once and for all to not see Guo Fu ever again, these brothers would definitely fight over her again until one of them lost their life.

What medicine is there that doesn't taste bitter? For good to come out of this, there must be a little suffering. He hurried his swordplay and kept on pressing relentlessly. The brothers became more and more alarmed as they fought on but with the rod like a blur threatening all their vitals, they could only clench their teeth and defend with all they had.

The "Yue Maiden Swordplay" that the Wu brothers had learned was actually itself a powerful swordplay but the two had yet to reach a high level of proficiency with it; when Guo Jing taught them he wasn't too good with his words so he

wasn't able to pass on the more intricate and subtle points of the swordplay to them. As a result, if the Wu brothers fought your average Wulin fighter, the brothers would prove more than a match for them; but under the rod of Yang Guo, there were endless weaknesses. Yang Guo's "Jade Flute Swordplay" had yet to be perfected as well but his martial arts were a lot better than the Wu brothers. Plus, the Wu brothers were in an emotional state and so their stances were even more flawed.

Yang Guo did not use his fatal stances and instead, slowly transferred his internal energy into the rod. After fighting for a while, the two brothers felt that their opponent's rod was exuding a strong sucking force, causing their swords to twist and turn. One sword aimed towards the opponent but the tip of the sword turned in the opposite direction to where it was meant to go. The force that the rod emitted got stronger and stronger until it forced the brothers to fight each other. One stance of Wu Dunru's that aimed for Yang Guo almost struck his own brother and Wu Xiuwen himself almost slashed Wu Dunru; Wu Dunru had to use all his strength to block the attack.

Yang Guo gave a long laugh and said, "There's more to the 'Jade Flute Swordplay' than this, you better be careful!" 'Dang', the wooden rod met with Wu Dunru's sword. The rod had met with the face of the sword and remained completely intact. Wu Dunru felt an extremely powerful sucking force pulling outwards almost forcing the sword out of his hands. He had to quickly transfer his energy to the sword to snatch it back. Yang Guo's wooden rod followed his force and trapped Wu Xiuwen's sword as well. Yang Guo then pushed downwards and forced the swords to the ground. The brothers pulled loose; Yang Guo stepped forward onto the swords tips and raised the wooden rod towards them, lightly touching their throats. Yang Guo laughed, "Well?"

If the wooden rod were a sharp sword, the brothers' throats would have been cut open. And even with the wooden rod, if Yang Guo had put a bit more force behind the attack, the brothers would surely suffer a serious injury. The brothers' faces were ash grey and they kept silent in misery. Yang Guo raised his left foot and leapt back three paces. He watched the brothers' wretched expressions. Memories of the insult of being beaten up by the two filled his mind, now that he's gotten his own back today; a look of satisfaction came over his face.

The brothers no longer had any suspicions and were now convinced that Yang Guo had indeed received teaching of great skills from Huang Rong. But the brothers have been in love with Guo Fu ever since they were young; to end it like this in a single fight and to not ever see her again was something they were not prepared to do. Also, in the sword fight, the opponent had gotten the initiative straight away and they were forced onto the back foot; they had not even used ten percent of what their Master had taught them and there was no chance for them to use their newly learned "Solitary Yang Finger".

Wu Xiuwen shouted, "Brother, if we leave it like this, what point is there in living on? Let's just fight to the death!"

Wu Dunru's heart stirred and he called out, "Yes!"

The two of them lifted their swords and attacked; they no longer cared about defending themselves and attacked with every stance.

This change in approach was indeed impressive, by just attacking and not defending, they were going to try to take Yang Guo's life even if it meant dying by his hand in the process. Yang Guo pointed at their vitals but the two ignored it, using a sword in their right hand and unleashing the

“Solitary Yang Finger” with their left, they used all their best skills as they tried to kill their opponent.

Yang Guo laughed, “Good, this is more like it!” He threw away his wooden rod and moved around within the blades. The brothers fought more and more viciously as they went on but still they were unable to harm him.

Wu Santong watched from the side with mixed feelings; he hoped that Yang Guo would win so his sons would forget about Guo Fu but he also hoped that his sons would be able to defeat Yang Guo as they delivered their dangerous strokes. Suddenly, he heard Yang Guo give a crisp whistle and then saw him flicking the swords with his finger; ‘dang’, ‘dang’, the two swords flew towards the sky. Yang Guo caught the swords in his hands and laughed, “This “Divine Release of the Flicking Finger” was also taught to me by my mother-in-law!”

Now that it’s got to this stage, the brothers knew that continued fighting would just result in further embarrassment for them. Yang Guo flipped the swords around and shot the swords towards them. He bowed and said, “My apologies.”

Wu Xiuwen replied miserably, “Fine, I’ll never see sister Fu again.” He then held his sword across and moved the blade towards his throat. Wu Dunru’s feelings were the same as his brother and he too held his sword across his neck to kill himself.

Yang Guo was shocked to see this and quickly flew across to them; two ‘dang’ sounds were heard as he flicked their swords away with his finger once again. The handles of the sword flipped outwards and swords collided, ‘dong’; and the swords broke in two. As this happened, Wu Santong had leaped out and quickly grabbed his sons around the neck from behind, he yelled, “The two of you are giving up your

own lives for a woman, you don't deserve to be called a man."

Wu Xiuwen lifted his head and said forlornly, "Father... didn't you... didn't a woman cause a life of unhappiness for you as well? I..." Before he could finish, he saw the remnants of tears on his father's face under the starlight showing he was extremely hurt by their actions. Fighting with his brother like this had caused his father great pain and as he thought about this, he called out. Wu Santong loosened his grip and hugged him. His left hand hugged Wu Dunru and the three of them were held in a mutual embrace. Wu Dunru thought about how he had given his heart to Guo Fu but she and Yang Guo had already become a couple. Even their Master wife had kept it from him and his brother that she had picked him out to be her son-in-law and taught him her greatest skills. It appeared that everyone had treated them falsely and only fatherly and brotherly love between them is real; he hugged his father and couldn't stop himself from crying.

Yang Guo had always been an impetuous fellow. On this occasion his intentions were good, but he had caused the Wu brothers great humiliation. As he watched the father and sons in their loving embrace, he felt great satisfaction in his heart. Although he hasn't long to live, he has at least done one good deed before he died.

Wu Santong said, "Stupid boys, why should a man worry about not having a wife? Since that Guo girl doesn't love you why should you keep her in your hearts? We have a great mission that we need to take care of...what is it?"

Wu Xiuwen raised his head and said, "To avenge mother's death."

Wu Santong shouted, "Yes! We have to kill that Scarlet Serpent Deity Li Mochou even if we have to go to the ends of the earth."

Yang Guo was alarmed and thought, "I have to lure these three away, if Martial Uncle Li sees them there will be trouble."

Just as he was thinking this, he heard Li Mochou say coldly from the cave, "Why go to the ends of the earth? Li Mochou has been waiting here a long time." She came out from the cave with the baby in her left hand and her fly whisk in her right, her gown was fluttering in the wind as she exuded a graceful aura.

The Wu family could not have guessed that this demoness would appear right here right now; Wu Santong roared as he threw himself forward. Wu Dunru and Wu Xiuwen picked up their broken swords and attacked in a pincer formation.

Yang Guo called out, "Please stop everyone, and listen to what I've got to say."

Wu Santong called out, "Brother Yang, we'll talk after this demoness is dead." As he said this, his left palm and right finger had unleashed three deadly stances. The Wu brothers' swords may have been broken but in close combat the broken blades acted like a dagger and they still packed a considerable punch.

Yang Guo knew that they had a blood feud between them and his words alone would not stop them, he was just worried about the safety of the baby and he called out, "Martial Uncle Li, pass the baby to me."

Wu Santong was shocked when he heard this and leapt back two paces. He asked, "Why did you call her Martial Uncle Li?"

Li Mochou laughed, "Good Martial Nephew, you attack him from behind while I hold the baby."

After taking three of Wu Santong's stances, she felt that his internal energy had made great improvements; he was a

completely different opponent to the one she faced in Jiaxing all those years ago. With the Wu brothers, who were no weaklings, attacking her without regard for their lives, it would be difficult to fend them all off. She deliberately called Yang Guo her 'good Martial Nephew' to distract the three of them.

Wu Santong did indeed fall for her trick and shouted, "Dun'er, Wen'er, you be careful of that one named Yang, I'll take care of this witch myself."

Yang Guo kept his hands by his side and moved away. He said, "I'm not helping anyone but you must not harm the baby."

Wu Santong relaxed when he saw that Yang Guo had moved away and increased the power of his palms as he moved forwards.

Li Mochou defended with her fly whisk and then said, "Young Masters Wu, what I saw just now showed me that you are the sentimental kind, you are not like other vile heartless men. Because of this, I will spare your lives today; now leave!"

Wu Xiuwen replied angrily, "You evil, despicable bitch, what do you know about sentimentality?" He then advanced forward and attacked with vicious stances.

Li Mochou said with fury, "You don't know what's good for you fool!" The fly whisk turned around from in to out, forming a circle as it was whipped out. The fly whisk collided with Wu Xiuwen's sword and he felt a throbbing pain in his chest, almost forcing him to drop his sword. Wu Santong chopped a palm forward and Li Mochou turned her fly whisk back to defend. Wu Xiuwen had avoided danger for now.

Yang Guo moved behind Li Mochou slowly so that as soon as there was a slight opening in her stances, he could dive in

straight away and rescue the baby. But the Wu's were fighting extremely hard, forcing Li Mochou to defend her entire body with her fly whisk. He could not find a single opening. Yang Guo watched as the Wu's fought without restraint and there was no intent to avoid the baby in their attacks. If something happened, how would he face the Guo couple? He called out loudly, "Martial Uncle Li, pass the baby to me!" He advanced forward while sending a palm out to knock the fly whisk aside and tried to snatch the baby away.

Li Mochou was completely surrounded with enemies to the left and right, in front and behind, so she had no time to struggle with him but she also was not willing to give up the baby as easily as that. She yelled, "You dare try to snatch her away? If I just squeeze my arm, what do you think is going to happen to her?" Yang Guo was taken aback by this, how could he continue his advance?

With Li Mochou slightly distracted, Wu Santong threw out a fierce left palm that had a finger coming behind it; the index finger of his right hand had sealed a pressure point on her waist. Li Mochou immediately felt half her body going numb, forcing her to stumble and almost fall. But she moved with her momentum and threw out a kick that disarmed Wu Dunru and then she swept down viciously with her fly whisk at Wu Xiuwen. Wu Santong quickly pulled Wu Xiuwen back and allowed him to avoid this fatal strike. Li Mochou's injuries were not light and she motioned her fly whisk about as she escaped back into the cave.

Wu Santong was delighted with this and he called out, "That evil witch has taken a blow from my finger; it's going to be difficult for her to escape from us today." The Wu brothers held their broken swords out and wanted to advance into the cave.

Wu Santong called out, "Wait, be careful of her poisonous needles, we'll wait here and think of a plan to..." Before he finished, a roar came from within the cave and a leopard leapt out.

The Wu's were shocked by the sudden appearance of this beast, and in their shock, came a flurry of silver light; silver needles had suddenly been shot out from beneath the leopard. They could have predicted that this was going to happen but luckily for Wu Santong, his study of martial arts was deep, his reactions swift and agile, and he was able to leap away from this danger. But he heard his sons crying out, giving him the fright of his life. He watched as Li Mochou clung beneath the leopard, with her fly whisk tucked behind her neck, the baby in her left hand and gripping the leopard with her right hand and legs. She gave a cackle as the leopard leapt away and escaped into the mountain brook.

Even Yang Guo was shocked by this sudden turn of events; he watched as the leopard ran away and quickly began to chase after it as he called out, "Martial Uncle Li..."

Wu Santong was worried to death as he saw his sons lying on the ground unable to get up, he called out, "I'm going to kill you today." He reached out to grab Yang Guo.

Yang Guo was taken by surprise and was caught by him, he said quickly, "Let me go! I need to get the baby back!"

Wu Santong said, "Fine, let's all die here today."

Yang Guo quickly used the "Little Trapping Hand Technique" to try to release his fingers. Wu Santong was extremely restless and anxious and his mind was slightly unclear; however his martial arts were completely unaffected. He held onto Yang Guo's waist with his left hand and he too used the "Little Trapping Hand" with his right hand against Yang Guo.

Yang Guo saw that Li Mochou and the leopard were out of sight, he was not going to catch up with them any time soon and sighed, "Why are you holding onto me? The most important thing right now is to tend to their wounds."

Wu Santong said with joy, "Yes, yes, can you cure the poison from the needles?" He released Yang Guo from his grasp.

Yang Guo examined the Wu brothers and saw that Wu Dunru had been struck by a needle in his left shoulder, Wu Xiuwen a needle in his right leg. By now, the poison had taken effect and their breathing was now shallow as they lay there unconscious.

Yang Guo tore a piece of cloth from Wu Dunru and removed the needles.

Wu Santong quickly asked, "Have you got the antidote? Have you?"

Yang Guo saw that it would be difficult to save them from the poison and sadly shook his head.

Wu Santong loved his sons deeply and he was full of pain. He remembered how his wife died from sucking the poison from him; suddenly he threw himself onto Wu Xiuwen and moved his lips towards the wound.

Yang Guo was alarmed by this and called out, "You can't do this!" He sealed his 'Great Shuttle' pressure point with his finger.

Wu Santong was not prepared for this and immediately fell down. He couldn't move and tears rolled down from his eyes as he watched his sons.

Something popped into Yang Guo's head, "In five days time, the Passion Flower poison in me will take effect. There is not much difference between whether I live five days more or

five days less. The Wu brothers are not outstanding characters but this Uncle Wu is one who loves with all his heart, and just like me, he has had a life of misery. So be it, I'll give up my five days so their family can be reunited and his wishes fulfilled." He placed his lips on Wu Xiuwen's wound and sucked the venom out. After spitting out a few mouthfuls of the poison, he tended to Wu Dunru's wound.

Wu Santong watched from the side with indescribable gratefulness, he cursed the fact that his pressure point was sealed and could not join him in extracting the poison. Yang Guo took turns on each of the wounds and after a while, he noticed the bitter taste had gradually become slightly salty. He felt himself getting dizzy and knew that he was poisoned deeply, but he forced himself to suck a few more mouthfuls and after spitting the poison out, his eyes went blank and he fell unconscious.

He was out for a long, long time. Gradually, he could see the blurry images of many people in front of him. He wanted to see what exactly was happening but as he did so, he found it more difficult to focus and his eyes closed once again. A long time passed before he was able to open his eyes once more and as he did so, he saw the delighted face of Wu Santong in front of him calling out, "Good, finally!" Wu Santong knelt in front of him and kowtowed to him many times. He said, "Brother Yang, you... you saved... you saved my sons and you've saved my old life." He picked himself up and then threw himself down in front of another person and kowtowed to him. He called out, "Thank you Martial Uncle, thank you Martial Uncle."

Yang Guo looked at the person closely and saw that he was dark faced with a tall nose and deep set eyes; his appearance was similar to that of Nimoxing, and he had short, curly white hair, a man of old age. Yang Guo knew that Wu Santong was a disciple of the Reverend Yideng but he

didn't know that he also had an Indian Martial Uncle. He wanted to sit up but found that his strength had escaped him; he looked around and saw that he was lying on a bed. It was the room that he had stayed in while he was in Xiangyang. Now that he knew he was still alive and still had a chance to see Xiao Longnu one more time, he couldn't stop himself from blurting out, "Gu Gu...Gu Gu!"

Someone went over to his bed and gently placed their hand on his forehead. The person said, "Guo'er, you need to rest, your Gu Gu has some other business to attend to outside the city." It was Guo Jing.

Yang Guo saw that he had recovered from his injuries and was greatly relieved but immediately thought, "Uncle Guo's injuries require seven days and nights to heal, could it be that I have been unconscious for this period of time? But why hasn't the Passion Flower poison in me taken effect?" With this shock, his mind went into a daze and he fainted once more.

By the time he woke up again, it was night. There was a red candle in front of the bed and Wu Santong was still watching by his bedside.

Yang Guo smiled, "Uncle Wu, I'm alright, you don't have to worry. The young Masters Wu are fine?"

Wu Santong's eyes were filled with tears and he just nodded, not saying a word.

Yang Guo had never received such gratitude from anyone in his whole life and felt uncomfortable with this so he changed the subject and asked, "How did we get back to Xiangyang?"

Wu Santong wiped his tears with his sleeve and said, "My apprentice brother Zhu received instructions from your Master Miss Long to take the red horse to you in the valley.

When he got there, he found the four of us on the ground and quickly rescued us and took us back to the city.”

Yang Guo asked with surprise, “How did my Master know that I was in that valley? Why did she have to ask Uncle Zhu to take the horse to me, why not herself?”

Wu Santong shook his head and said, “When I returned to the city, I did not see Miss Long. Apprentice brother Zhu said that though she is of a young age, her martial arts are abundant; it’s a pity that I did not have the chance to greet her. Aiii, look how able the young are.”

Yang Guo was delighted with his sincere praise of Xiao Longnu. According to age, Wu Santong was more than old enough to be Xiao Longnu’s father but he actually used the word ‘greet’ in his sentences, this respect of the Master is due to the debt of the disciple. Yang Guo smiled and said, “My injuries...”

Wu Santong interrupted, “Brother Yang, though helping others in times of need in the world of Wulin is a common practice, your risking your life to save others, including, of all people, my sons who have deeply offended you in the past, no one can match your kindness except my Master...”

Yang Guo kept on shaking his head and told him to stop. Wu Santong ignored him and continued, “If I call you great benefactor, I know you will not agree to it. But if you keep on calling me uncle, you are showing that you do not respect me.”

Yang Guo had always been straightforward and had usually avoided small talk. He had already set his mind on making Xiao Longnu his wife; he didn’t care about custom and tradition so he said, “Fine, I’ll call you brother Wu. But it will be a bit inconvenient to use this greeting in front of your sons.”

Wu Santong said, "What about that greeting? You saved their little lives; they should listen to your every request, even if it means being your slave."

Yang Guo said, "Brother Wu, there's no need to thank me. I have already contracted the Passion Flower poison; I wouldn't have lived long anyway, so saving your sons wasn't a very important risk."

Wu Santong said, "Brother Yang, you can't say that. Even if your poison is incurable, a normal person would still want to live as long as possible."

Yang Guo smiled and asked, "How long have we been in Xiangyang?"

Wu Santong said, "Today is the seventh day."

Yang Guo had a look of confusion on his face and said, "Logically, I should be dead by now, how come I'm still alive, that's strange."

Wu Santong said with joy, "My martial uncle is a great Indian sage; when it comes to healing wounds and curing poison, he's probably the world's best. Years ago when my Master mistakenly took a poison that Mrs. Guo sent, it was he who cured my Master. I'll go and get him." He hurriedly left the room.

Joy filled Yang Guo's heart as he thought, "Could it be that while I was unconscious, that great Indian sage gave me a miracle panacea that purged even my Passion Flower poison? I wonder where Gu Gu is now? If she finds out I don't have to die, she'll be filled with joy!" As the sentimental thoughts filled his mind, his head ached and his chest felt as if a hammer had smashed against him, the pain was unbearable and he couldn't stop himself from crying out. He hasn't felt such pain since he took half of Qiu Qianchi's antidote, it must

be that the effects of the antidote have now passed while the poison remained; he clutched his chest and clenched his teeth. His head was covered with sweat.

Just as the pain was becoming excruciating, the door suddenly opened and a voice said, "Nanwu Amitufo." The Indian monk's arms were folded as he entered. Wu Santong followed and when he saw Yang Guo in distress, he was shocked and asked, "Brother Yang, how are you feeling?" He turned to the Indian monk and said, "Martial uncle, his poison is flaring up, give him the antidote quickly!" The Indian monk did not understand what he was saying and went over to Yang Guo and checked his pulse.

Wu Santong said, "Oh yes!" He quickly went to get Zhu Ziliu. Zhu Ziliu was well versed in Sanskrit and he was the only person who could communicate with the Indian monk. Zhu Ziliu arrived to translate.

Yang Guo gathered his wits and as the pain lessened, he explained to the Indian monk how he contracted this poison.

The Indian monk asked in great detail as to what the Passion Flower looked like and was shocked with what he heard. He said, "The Passion Flower is a species that has been extinct for a long time. According to the scriptures, the Passion Flower once ravaged the lives of many people; the Buddha Wenshu Shili eradicated the flower with his great wisdom. Who would know that some still existed in the central plains? I have never seen this flower before; I really don't know how to cure this poison." His face was filled with pity.

After Wu Santong heard Zhu Ziliu's translation, he kept on calling out, "Have mercy Martial Uncle; have mercy!"

The Indian monk folded his arms and recited, "Amitoufu." He closed his eyes and went into deep thought. Silence filled the room; no one dared to make a noise.

After a while, the Indian monk opened his eyes and said, "When Master Yang sucked the poison from my Martial Grandsons, the poison from the 'Soul Freezing Needles' should have killed you. But Master Yang has survived until now. The date for the Passion Flower's poison to activate has passed, yet you are still alive. Could it be that the poisons are fighting each other and allowed Master Yang to reap his rewards for his deeds?"

Zhu Ziliu nodded his head and after translating, Yang Guo too felt that this was a reasonable explanation.

The Indian monk continued, "People say what comes around goes around, Master Yang has saved the lives of others while risking his own, if this saying is true, an antidote will surely exist."

After hearing Zhu Ziliu's translation, Wu Santong leapt with joy and said, "I implore Martial Uncle to come up with an antidote as soon as possible."

The Indian monk said, "I need to visit the Passionless valley."

Yang Guo and the others were shocked. The journey to Passionless Valley was not a short one, getting there and getting back will take a long time.

The Indian monk said, "I need to see the Passionless Valley with my own eyes and test the poison before I can make an antidote. Before I return, Master Yang must refrain from sentimental thoughts; otherwise, the pain will get stronger and stronger each time. If you damage your life line then there will be no return."

Before Yang Guo could reply, Wu Santong said loudly, "Apprentice brother, let's go to the Passionless Valley together and force that old hag to hand over the antidote."

After being poisoned by Huo Dou, Zhu Ziliu was able to receive the antidote thanks to Yang Guo; he had wanted to repay him a long time and said, "Yes, we'll escort Martial Uncle and whether we'll take the antidote by force or whether Martial Uncle can make one himself, we'll get the antidote one way or the other."

The apprentice brothers spoke spiritedly but the Indian monk was looking at Yang Guo with worry on his brows.

End of Chapter 23.

Chapter 24 - Turbulent Emotions

Translated by Noodles



Yang Guo sat on the floor without any strength to retaliate, he was just holding his arm up across his chest to protect himself but there was no sign of pleading for mercy in his eyes. Guo Fu bit down on her teeth and increasing the strength in her hand, she chopped down with her sword.

Though Yang Guo saw that the Indian monk had a glint in his eye, his lips seemed to have a sorrowful expression and from that, he knew that it would be extremely difficult to cleanse his body of the poison. By now, the monk had finished his examination and so, Yang Guo smiled at him and said, "Reverend, please be honest."

The Indian monk said, "The suffering from the Passion Flower is different to that of other poisons. The poison becomes one with sentiment and thus suffering goes straight to the heart. From what I can tell, the roots of love are deep in you; separating the poison from it will be very difficult. Even if we manage to get the other half of the antidote, you may not fully recover. But if you can sever your roots then there will be no need for any antidote at all. Going to the Passionless Valley is something that we feel must be done, whether you can recover will depend on you only."

Yang Guo thought, "You want me to stop loving Gu Gu? What's the point of living then? You might as well just leave me be and let me die." His mouth gratefully replied, "Thank you for the advice Reverend." He had wanted to tell Wu Santong and the others not to go to Passionless Valley but he knew that these people value the code of brotherhood strongly and would not listen to him. Talking to them would just be a waste of his efforts.

Wu Santong smiled, "Brother Yang, take care and rest peacefully. We'll leave first thing in the morning and come back as soon as possible. When you've recovered, we'll have a drink at your and Miss Guo's wedding."

This took Yang Guo aback, but he knew that this matter was complicated and he would not be able to clear it up in a short period of time, so he just agreed. After seeing the door close behind the three as they left, Yang Guo closed his eyes once again and rested.

Again, he slept for hours. By the time he woke up, dawn had broken and the sounds of birds chirping could be heard. Yang Guo had not eaten for days and by now was starving; he saw four dishes by the side of the bed and took a few slices of the cakes that were there. After eating two slices, the door suddenly made a noise and after a creak opened lightly.

The red candle that was by the bedside was now about an inch long and was still alight. Yang Guo could see that the person who had entered was wearing a pale red gown and had an angry expression on their face; it was Guo Fu.

Yang Guo froze before saying, "Miss Guo, it's early."

Guo Fu replied with a 'humph'. Without saying a word, she sat down on a chair in front of the bed with her eyebrows raised, and her angry eyes stared at Yang Guo. A long time passed and still, she did not make a sound.

Yang Guo was made uncomfortable by this stare and smiled, "Has Uncle Guo told you to come here to tell me something?"

She replied, "No!"

After being spoken to twice like this, the Yang Guo of a few days back would have just turned his back and ignored her. He saw that there was something bothering her but he

couldn't tell why she was here so early in the morning so he asked again, "Is Auntie Guo okay after giving birth?"

Guo Fu's face seemed to become even more frosty and she replied coldly, "My mother's health is none of your concern."

Apart from Xiao Longnu, Yang Guo would never back down from anyone, after being treated like this, Yang Guo could no longer suppress his pride and thought, "So what if your father is Hero Guo and your mother is Chief Huang?" He replied with a snort of his own.

Guo Fu said, "What are you snorting at?"

Yang Guo ignored her and snorted again.

Guo Fu said loudly, "I said what are you snorting at?"

Yang Guo was amused by this and thought, "Looks like in the end, the little girl can't keep her composure, I just snorted twice and she's already agitated." He said, "I'm feeling unwell, snorting like this makes my body feel a bit better."

Guo Fu said angrily, "Always making things up, what a liar, you really are a despicable person."

After being insulted by her, Yang Guo suddenly thought of something, "Could it be that she knows about the things I'd said to the Wu brothers to stop them fighting?" Though he saw that she was angry, her beauty made him pity her. He was born with a flirtatious nature and he couldn't stop himself from smiling, "Miss Guo, are you offended by what I said to the Wu brothers?"

Guo Fu lowered her voice and said, "What did you say to them? Tell me with your own mouth."

Yang Guo smiled, "I did it for their own good; I stopped those brothers from fighting each other to the end and prevented

grief for their father. Uncle Wu told you this, didn't he?"

Guo Fu said, "As soon as Uncle Wu saw me, he began to congratulate me and started to praise you to high heaven. How...how can I let you dirty my chaste name as you please?" By now, her voice was starting to break and tears flowed down her cheeks.

Yang Guo lowered his head and didn't say a word; he was extremely regretful as to what he said that night, he'd let his tongue move too fast when he was talking to the Wu brothers. The more he said, the more arrogant the words became; he did not consider that he had sullied Guo Fu's name. It was his words that had caused this trouble; it would not be easy for him to repair it.

When Guo Fu saw that he had lowered his head and stayed silent, she was even angrier and cried out, "Uncle Wu said that big and little brother Wu couldn't beat you and so were forced by you to never see me again, is that true?"

Yang Guo sighed to himself thinking, "Wu Santong doesn't know when to keep his mouth shut, why did he have to tell her all this?" He could deny no longer and could only nod his head, saying, "I know I shouldn't have said all those lies but there was no ill intent behind my words; please forgive me."

Guo Fu wiped away her tears and said with anger, "Uncle Wu said that once you've recovered from your illness, he wants to...wants to drink at our wedding, why did you agree?"

Yang Guo thought, "Oh no! So he also told her about what I said last night as well." He could only argue, "I was still feeling a bit woozy then, I did not hear Uncle Wu's words properly."

Guo Fu could tell he was lying and said loudly, "You said that my mother taught you martial arts in secret and had picked

you out to be her son-in-law, is this true?"

Yang Guo blushed at her questions and was feeling embarrassed, he thought, "Joking with Miss Guo will just lead to her insulting me a bit more. I'm not a gentleman so it doesn't really matter much, but lying about Auntie Guo teaching me martial arts is a completely different matter altogether. I can't let Auntie Guo know about this." He said quickly, "Miss Guo, this again was due to me speaking without thinking. I implore you, ignore it and don't let your parents know about the matter."

Guo Fu laughed coldly, "Since you are afraid of my father, why do you still make up lies to insult my mother?"

Yang Guo quickly said, "I had no intention of insulting Auntie Guo; at that time all I was concerned about was making the Wu brothers forget about you, I was speaking without thinking..."

Guo Fu grew up with the two brothers and had feelings for both of them; when she found out that Yang Guo had lied to the Wu brothers to get them to forget about her and never see her again, how could she control her anger? She asked loudly, "I'll sort this out later. Where's my sister? Where did you take her?"

Yang Guo said, "Oh yes, please get Uncle Guo, that's what I wanted to speak to him about."

Guo Fu said, "My father has left the city to look for my sister. You... you despicable person, you actually wanted to exchange my sister for your antidote. So it's like that is it, your life is worth something unlike my sister's."

Yang Guo had been ashamed of himself concerning this matter, but now on hearing her bring up the matter about the baby, he felt he had nothing to be ashamed of and said

clearly, “My mission was to rescue your sister and bring her back to your parents. No thoughts of exchanging her for my antidote entered the mind of Yang Guo.”

Guo Fu said, “So where’s my sister then? Where is she?”

Yang Guo said, “Li Mochou has her and I’m ashamed of myself for not being able to rescue her. As soon as my strength returns and if I’m still alive, I will immediately go search for her.”

Guo Fu laughed coldly, “Li Mochou is your Martial Uncle isn’t she? You two had been hiding together in a cave, hadn’t you?”

Yang Guo said “That’s right, she is my Martial Uncle but my Master and she have never gotten along with each other.”

Guo Fu said, “Never gotten along with each other? So why did she listen to your request and take my sister away to exchange for the antidote?”

Yang Guo sat up and said angrily, “Miss Guo, watch your reckless words, I Yang Guo may not be a person of great worth but how would I even contemplate such thoughts?”

Guo Fu said, “Well said, this ‘contemplate such thoughts’! This came from your own Master, could it be a lie?”

Yang Guo said, “What did my Master say?”

Guo Fu stood up and pointed her finger at Yang Guo’s nose before saying with anger on her face, “Your Master told Uncle Zhu that you and Li Mochou were in that cave in that valley, she asked Uncle Zhu to take the red horse to you so you can race to the Passionless Valley with my sister...”

Yang Guo interrupted, “Yes, my Master did have this thought; she wanted me to take your sister there and get the antidote

first then doing something about the matter afterwards. But this was just one of the ideas that came up, and none would result in harm to your sister...”

Guo Fu butted in, “Within a day of being born, you handed her over to a cold blooded murderer, and yet you talk about not harming my sister. You scoundrel! When you were younger and all alone as an orphan, how did my parents treat you? If they hadn’t taken you to Peach Blossom Island and taken care of you, where would you be now? Who knew that you’d repay kindness with vengeance; you conspired with the Mongols and while my parents were unwell, you took the opportunity to steal my sister away...” Her insults were becoming more and more vicious, how could Yang Guo argue back? His body was weak after being poisoned again and as his breathing became agitated; he fainted and fell back onto the bed with a thud.

After a long while, Yang Guo came around. Guo Fu stared at him coldly and said, “I never would have guessed you still knew what shame was. You knew that this was your intention; you can’t face living with yourself can you?” Her expression was icy and cold, her words were as sharp as a blade.

Yang Guo let out a long sigh and said, “If I really had this thought then why didn’t I take your sister to Passionless Valley?”

Guo Fu said, “It would be difficult for you to travel in your condition so you asked your Martial Uncle for help. Luckily, it seemed fate had other ideas; I overheard your Master’s and Uncle Zhu’s conversation and I immediately hid the red horse away. Let’s see how you and your Master’s evil plan will work now...”

Yang Guo said, “Fine, say whatever you want, there’s no point in me arguing. Where’s my Master? Where is she?”

Guo Fu's face became a little red and said, "Like Master like pupil, your Master is not a nice person as well."

Yang Guo was furious and sat up, saying, "You can shout and insult me all you like, I'll let it go in respect for your parents. How dare you insult my Master?"

Guo Fu said, "Bah! What about your Master? Who told her to say those words?"

Yang Guo thought, "Gu Gu is an innocent person and does not show the emotions of the human world; how could she provoke her with words?" He scoffed and said, "It's probably your warped little mind twisting the words of my Master."

Guo Fu had not wanted to reveal what Xiao Longnu had said to her but after being aggravated by him, she could not control her anger and said, "She said, 'Miss Guo, Guo'er is a person with a pure and good heart, he has suffered and been lonely all his life, and she must take care of him.' She then said, 'You two are... are a match made in heaven! Tell him to forget me, I will not be offended.' She then gave me a sword and said it was called the Lady Sword; it's a match with... with your Gentleman Sword. If this isn't rubbish then what is?" She was angry and embarrassed as she said this and her voice did not carry the sincere and mournful tone that Xiao Longnu had said these words with.

Each time he listened to a sentence, Yang Guo felt as if his heart was being rammed violently, his mind was full of confusion, and he didn't understand how Xiao Longnu could say something like this. After a while, he noticed that Guo Fu had finished and slowly raised his head. His eyes flashed as he shouted, "You liar, why would my Master say something like that? Where's the Lady sword? If you can't show it to me then you are a liar!"

Guo Fu gave a cold laugh and turned her wrist and removed a sword from her back that was black; it was the Lady Sword from the Passionless Valley.

Yang Guo was filled with disappointment and blurted out, "Who wants to be a match with you? This sword belongs to my Master, you stole it from her. You stole it from her!"

Guo Fu had always been a proud girl. Her parents gave her a little leeway and the Wu brothers let her have her way no matter what, how could she take these harsh words? She only decided to pass on Xiao Longnu's words because Yang Guo had provoked her and left her with no choice. Who knew that he would come up with such a reply? And now the words said seemed to suggest that it was she that made this whole thing up and it was she who wanted to marry him while he plainly refused. With such anger, her hand held the sword and was about to chop down with it but a thought came into her mind, "Since he respects his Master so much, let me tell him something that will drive him mad."

She was filled with anger and she did not even give a thought about the possible terrible consequences that would result from her words. A swooshing sound was heard as she sheathed the half exposed Lady Sword and sat down on a chair, laughing as she did so. She said, "Your Master is beautiful and her martial arts are strong, she is indeed a rare breed but there's just one thing that's not proper about her."

Yang Guo said, "What?"

Guo Fu replied, "It's just a pity that she does not act in a respectable manner and has been sneaking around to meet up with those Quanzhen Taoists."

Yang Guo angrily replied, "My Master has a feud with the Quanzhen sect, why would she be meeting up with them in secret."

Guo Fu gave a cold laugh and said, "When I said that she was 'sneaking around to meet them', I said the polite version. There are some things that would be inappropriate for a girl to say."

Yang Guo was becoming more and more furious as he listened, he shouted loudly, "My Master is pure and chaste; if you say another lie I'll tear your mouth off."

Guo Fu had an icy look in her eyes as she said coldly, "That's right, she was able to do it but I'm unable to say it. What a nice pure and chaste girl, going around being intimate with a rotten Taoist."

Yang Guo's face became green and he shouted, "What did you say?"

Guo Fu said, "I heard it with my own ears, don't tell me I'm wrong. Two Quanzhen Taoists came to pay their respects to my father but they turned up just when the city was in a mess, my parents were unwell and couldn't see them so I had to take care of the guests..."

Yang Guo shouted angrily, "Then what?"

Guo Fu saw that he was furious, his eyes were red and his forehead was tensed up, her plan was working and she continued, "One of the Taoists was called Zhao Zhijing, the other called Yin Zhiping, heard of them?"

Yang Guo said, "Then?"

Guo Fu gave a dry laugh and said, "I instructed my servants to prepare quarters for them and didn't take notice of them. But in the middle of the night, a Beggar Clan member came to tell me that those two Taoists had drawn swords and were fighting each other in their room..."

Yang Guo snorted as he knew that the two have always been at arms with each other, fighting each other in their room wasn't anything out of the ordinary."

Guo Fu continued, "I was curious so I quietly went to their window and looked in. By then, the two had sheathed their swords but they were still arguing. The one named Zhao said that the one named Yin and your Master did this and that and the one named Yin did not deny it, he was just angry with him for being so loud..."

Yang Guo suddenly flung his blanket off and sat up on the bed, he shouted, "What this and that?"

Guo Fu's face blushed; she looked a little embarrassed and said, "How would I know? Don't tell me its something good. Your precious Master knows what she's done." She said this with a derisive tone.

Yang Guo was angry and agitated, his emotions were in turmoil and he swung his hand out and slapped Guo Fu on the face. In a blaze of fury, his slap came out with great force and knocked Guo Fu into a daze, her face was red and swollen, if it weren't for the fact that Yang Guo was still not at full strength, this slap would have knocked her teeth out.

When has Guo Fu ever suffered such an insult? In anger, she unsheathed the Lady Sword from her waist, and went for Yang Guo's neck.

After slapping Guo Fu, he thought, "I've insulted Uncle and Auntie Guo's precious daughter. This girl is the princess of this city, even if Uncle and Auntie forgive me, how can I stay?"

He stretched out his leg to put on his shoes and saw Guo Fu's sword coming towards him, he gave a cold laugh and pulled

his left arm inwards and shot out his right hand, then with some light movements, he snatched the Lady Sword away.

Failing with two strokes in succession, Guo Fu's anger rose further. She saw that there was a sword by the head of the bed and grabbed it. Unsheathing the sword, she chopped at Yang Guo's head. Yang Guo saw a glimmer of light coming towards him and raised the Lady Sword across him to block the attack but after being unconscious for seven days, he had no strength to back up his movements. After raising the Lady Sword up to his chest, his arms felt limp and weak and he could raise it no further. Guo Fu's sword came in across and after a light clanging sound as the two swords collided, the Lady Sword fell out of his hand.

Guo Fu was furious about the slap that she had received, she thought, "You've brought harm to my sister you despicable person, I'll take your life today to avenge my sister. My parents will not blame me for this." She saw him sitting on the floor without any strength to retaliate, he was just holding his arm up across his chest to protect himself but there was no sign of pleading for mercy in his eyes. Guo Fu clenched her teeth and increasing the strength in her hand, she chopped down with her sword.

Previously:

That day when Xiao Longnu was looking for Yang Guo and Jinlun Fawang on the red horse, she had headed in the wrong direction. The horse galloped over ten li in one go and by the time she reined in the horse to go back, she had lost them completely. She was very anxious since the more time that passed, the more at risk Yang Guo's life would be. She rode around within thirty to forty li of Xiangyang searching for him.

The red horse was fast but the valley was well hidden and it was not until after midnight that she heard the cries of Wu

Santong. Heading in the direction of the cries, she soon came across the sounds of the clashing blades of the Wu brothers and then the sound of Yang Guo's voice. She was delighted that she had found him but was afraid that he had come across some strong foes so she decided to hide and help him in secret. She tied the red horse to a tree and quietly moved behind the rocky outcrop and watched Yang Guo face his foes.

There was no need for her to be anxious after she took a look but what she heard shocked her: Yang Guo was declaring that he and Guo Fu had been engaged long ago and calling her his fiancée. He was referring to Guo Jing and Huang Rong as his in-laws; she heard how Guo Jing and Huang Rong had picked him to be their son-in-law and secretly transmitted martial arts to him. She also saw how he lost his temper at the Wu brothers, saying they were not allowed to see Guo Fu. Every word of his struck out at her heart like lightning; she was confused and felt that her whole universe had changed within the blink of an eye. If it was anyone else who saw Yang Guo's actions changed suddenly like this, they would become suspicious and would ask him to explain everything afterwards. But Xiao Longnu's mind was as clear as a crystal, untouched by earthly dust; she did not know the lies and tricks of humankind. Yang Guo's tongue was silky smooth and talked rubbish to others; but to Xiao Longnu, he had never told a single lie and because of this that Xiao Longnu had never doubted his words. As she saw the Wu brothers losing, she pitied herself and let out a sigh. When Yang Guo heard the sigh and called out 'GuGu', she did not reply and hid further away. Yang Guo thought that it was Li Mochou who sighed and it was he who was mistaken so he did not give it much thought.

Leading the red horse, Xiao Longnu walked around without aim trying to think but she did not know what to do. She was now over twenty years of age but she had spent her whole

life in the tomb. She did not know a thing about the world; her relative experience was akin to that of a newborn baby. She thought, "Since Guo'er is going to marry Miss Guo; that means he won't be able to marry me. It's no wonder the Guo couple would not allow Guo'er and me to get married. Guo'er has kept this from me because he didn't want me to be sad, ah, he's still thinking of me." Her thoughts continued, "He failed to kill Hero Guo on many occasions to avenge his father and it was all because of Miss Guo. It appears that his love for Miss Guo runs very deep as well. If I go to give him the red horse now, he may begin to think about my good points again. This might disrupt their wedding in the future. It's better for me to return to the ancient tomb alone, this outside world is making me mad."

She pondered for a while and made her decision, even though her heart was in great pain, she was still thinking about saving Yang Guo. So she rode the red horse through the night back to Xiangyang and handed the horse over to Zhu Ziliu so he could deliver the red horse to Yang Guo in the valley.

At this time, though the attackers of Xiangyang had left long ago, Guo Jing and Huang Rong had yet to recover and the city was in chaos. The able Zhu Ziliu along with Lu Youjiao worked together on the important task of looking after the security of the city. Right in the middle of all this, Xiao Longnu walked up to him with red horse and asked him to take it to Yang Guo, saying that she wants Yang Guo to get to the Passionless Valley as soon as possible. She said to use the baby daughter of Guo Jing in exchange for the antidote; leaving Zhu Ziliu confused. He tried to ask her to explain but Xiao Longnu's mind was in turmoil and she did not want to speak much. She just said to get there as fast as possible; any delay may put Yang Guo's life at risk.

She ignored Guo Fu who was standing next to Zhu Ziliu and thought, "Your sister will be fine for a few days in the Passionless Valley, this is about the life of your fiancée, you yourself will naturally do all you can." As soon as she thought of Yang Guo, her heart filled with pain, before she could explain herself clearly tears rolled from her eyes. She ran to her room; lying on her bed, she sobbed despondently.

Zhu Ziliu did not know about anything related to this matter so how would he know what Xiao Longnu was talking about? But the words 'to get there as fast as possible, any delay may put Yang Guo's life at risk' was startling. All he could do was to go to the valley and then act accordingly. By the time he was ready to make his way to the valley, the red horse was nowhere to be seen. When he asked one of the soldiers, he said that Miss Guo had taken it away. Zhu Ziliu wanted to find her but she had hidden away. Zhu Ziliu sighed to himself and thought that all these young girls are unfathomable, without saying anything or explaining themselves, they just do what they want without thinking.

He was worried about the safety of Yang Guo so he found another fast horse and took a few Beggar Clan members with him. Following Xiao Longnu's directions they found the valley only to see Yang Guo and the Wu brothers lying on the ground with Wu Santong sitting on the ground meditating. The three lying on the ground were breathing shallowly, the words 'to get there as fast as possible, any delay may put Yang Guo's life at risk' were indeed true. He immediately took Yang Guo back to Xiangyang and his recently arrived Martial Uncle Indian Monk immediately tended to Yang Guo.

After crying on her bed for a while, Xiao Longnu was getting more and more depressed as she pondered her situation. She wasn't able to stop her tears. This crying left her sleeves completely soaked. She went to take a handkerchief from her waist to wipe away her tears when her fingertips touched the

Lady Sword. She thought, "It'll be worthwhile to go and give this sword to Miss Guo so they'll have a matching pair of swords."

She was deeply in love with Yang Guo, so no matter what it was, as long as something will benefit Yang Guo, she will go and do it without any qualms. She got off the bed and without wiping away the traces of her tears and went to see Guo Fu.

It was deep into the night now; Guo Fu was of course in bed. Xiao Longnu did not wait for any servants to call her, opening the window, she leapt into the room and woke Guo Fu up. She then said "You two are a match made in heaven!" etc, the words that Guo Fu passed onto Yang Guo. She handed the Lady Sword to Guo Fu and went to leave the room.

Guo Fu did not know what she was talking about and said, "What are you saying? I didn't understand a thing."

Xiao Longnu did not reply and leaped out of the window. Guo Fu stuck her head out of the window and called out, "Please come back Miss Long." However, Xiao Longnu did not turn back.

With her head lowered, Xiao Longnu made her way to the garden. A rose bush's fragrance floated about and it reminded her of the time on Mount Zhongnan when she and Yang Guo were practicing the Jade Maiden's Manual between the flower thickets. She wanted to go back to way things were when they were living together as Master and disciple yet there was no way it could happen.

In her daze, a voice came from the room to her left saying, "It's always Xiao Longnu this, Xiao Longnu that, can you stop saying that name for just one day?"

Xiao Longnu was shocked, "Who's always talking about me?" She stopped her footsteps and listened. Another person let out a dry laugh before saying, "So you can do it but I can't say it?"

The first person replied, "We are in someone else's home; with all these ears and eyes about, what would happen to the name of the Quanzhen sect if someone overhears?"

The other person laughed and said, "Oh, so you still remember about Quanzhen's name? That night by the rose bushes on Mount Zhongnan, that wonderful feeling... ha-ha." As he got to this point, he just continued laughing and did not say anything else.

Xiao Longnu was even more shocked when she heard this, her suspicions were roused and she thought, "Could it be that when Guo'er and I were unclothed, we were seen by those two Taoists?" From the sounds of the voices, she could tell it was Zhao Zhijing and Yin Zhiping so she moved quietly to the window and lowered her body as she listened. By now, the two's voices had become quieter but Xiao Longnu was quite close to them and could still hear everything clearly.

A frustrated Yin Zhiping said, "Martial Brother Zhao, you torture me day and night, what exactly do you want?"

Zhao Zhijing said, "You know what I want."

Yin Zhiping said, "What do you want me to do? I've already agreed, all I wanted was for you stop going on about this yet you are getting worse. Do you want me to die in front of you?"

Zhao Zhijing gave a cold laugh and said, "I don't know, I just can't help myself, I've got to say it."

Yin Zhiping suddenly raised his voice a little and said, "You really think I don't know? You're just envious of me, envious

of brief moment of bliss.” These two sentences were very strange. Zhao Zhijing did not reply, he seemed to want to laugh but could not.

After a long while, Yin Zhiping mumbled, “Yes, that night within the rose bushes, her accupoints were sealed by the Western Poison Ouyang Feng, she wasn’t able to move and I was able to fulfill my dream. I’m not going to deny it. If I didn’t tell you, you wouldn’t know about it, right? After I told you, you torment me non stop... yet, yet I do not regret it, no, not one single bit...” By now, his voice had become soft; it was as if he was talking in his dreams.

As Xiao Longnu heard this, her heart dropped and her mind seemed to run amok with noise. “Could it be that it was him, it wasn’t my beloved Guo’er? No, it wasn’t him, it can’t be him, he’s lying, and it must be Guo’er.”

She heard Zhao Zhijing continue in a cold tone, “Yes, of course you wouldn’t regret your actions. You didn’t have to tell me about this but you couldn’t keep your joy to yourself, you had to tell someone. When I started to remind you day and night about it, why did you become afraid to hear what I had to say?” Suddenly, a thudding noise on the wall was heard; it was Yin Zhiping banging his head against the wall. He said, “Fine say it, tell everyone, tell everyone in the world, I don’t care... no, no, apprentice brother Zhao, I’ll agree to whatever you want, just stop bringing this up.”

In the space of a night, Xiao Longnu had heard two heart shattering pieces of news; she stood outside the window in a dazed state, although she heard what they were saying, she was for the time being, unable to grasp the meaning behind their words.

Zhao Zhijing chuckled a few times and said, “As practicing Taoists, we need to keep a clear mind, a slip in our thoughts will lead to evil. The reason I keep on mentioning Xiao

Longnu is so that you will soon begin to hate and detest that name. I'm just helping you to adhere to the Taoist teachings."

Yin Zhiping said quietly, "She's a celestial being, how can I hate and detest her?" Suddenly he raised his voice and said, "Don't try to paint a pretty picture of what you are doing; do you think I'm blind to your ill intentions? One, you are jealous of me and two, you hate Yang Guo, you want to reveal this to everyone so that the two of them will have to live with this for the rest of their lives."

When Xiao Longnu heard the name 'Yang Guo', her heart skipped a beat. Quietly she repeated, "Yang Guo, Yang Guo." As she said these words, she was filled with a tender feeling and hoped that the two would keep on talking about Yang Guo. As long as someone mentions his name, she would be happy.

She listened on and now heard it was Zhao Zhijing's turn to raise his voice. He said with hate, "I won't rest until I teach that bastard a good lesson, humph, it's just that..."

Yin Zhiping said, "It's just that his martial arts are too high, neither you nor I are a match for him, right?"

Zhao Zhijing said, "That's not definite, what's so special about his evil sect's unorthodox martial arts? Once he's in my hands... ha-ha! Our Quanzhen sect's martial arts are the orthodox way, why should we be afraid of that scum? Apprentice brother Yin, just you watch, I'm not going to let him die easily. I'll break an arm here or a leg there; I'll make him wish that he was dead. How wonderful it would be if that Xiao Longnu were there to watch him suffer."

Xiao Longnu trembled as she heard this; if it was at any other place and time, she would have flown through the window and killed the two with one strike long ago. But now, her

despair had completely overwhelmed her; her body felt as if it was no longer under her own control.

She heard Yin Zhiping laugh coldly, "You can believe what you want. Our sect's orthodox arts may not be able to compete with their so called unorthodox martial arts."

Zhao Zhijing shouted, "You dog, you Quanzhen traitor! You even praise that Xiao Longnu's martial arts to high heaven!"

Yin Zhiping has been under this torrent of abuse long enough and could take it no longer, he shouted, "Why are you insulting me? You must know when you are pushing your limits!"

Zhao Zhijing knew that his opponent could do nothing to him. If this matter were leaked back amongst the sect, the previous sect leader Uncle Ma and the current leader Uncle Qiu will surely sentence him to death. That was why he had been handing out insults to him day and night. Yin Zhiping indeed did not retaliate. Now, he could tell that Yin was actually showing signs of rebelling. If he didn't make sure that he was in complete control, it would be difficult for his great plan to succeed, so he took a step forward and sent out a palm.

Yin Zhiping had not thought that he would actually resort to violence; he lowered his head quickly but the palm struck him heavily on the back of his neck, almost sending him to the floor. Enraged, he unsheathed his sword and thrust it forward. Zhao Zhijing moved his body out of the way and laughed, "Oh, so you've actually got the gall to raise your sword against me." He unsheathed his own sword and replied with a stroke of his own.

Yin Zhiping lowered his voice and said, "I'm going to die sooner or later under this constant torment of yours anyway, I might as well get it over with and let you kill me today." He

hurried his sword strokes and pressed his opponent. He was Qiu Chuji's strongest student, so he and Zhao Zhijing's martial arts both had their strong points. They both learned the same stances so once a fight started between the two, it would be difficult to tell who was going to be the winner. But Yin Zhiping had made up his mind. All he wanted was to take his opponent down with him while Zhao Zhijing had something else planned and wasn't going to take his life. Twenty or thirty stances later, Zhao Zhijing had been forced into one of the corners of the room and was losing.

The two's struggle had been reported by a Beggar Clan member to Guo Fu. Guo Fu dressed hurriedly and rushed to the scene to see Xiao Longnu standing outside. She called out, "Miss Long!"

Xiao Longnu's mind was somewhere else and she did not hear her.

Guo Fu was curious and so decided not to enter immediately. She too stood outside the window only to hear Zhao Zhijing coming out with derisive comments between his sword strokes. Every single comment related to Xiao Longnu.

When Guo Fu heard their words becoming more and more inappropriate: she decided to move away from the window. When she turned her head to move away, she caught a glimpse of a disorientated Xiao Longnu. It appeared that she did not take offence at what the two were saying; Guo Fu became extremely curious and quietly asked, "Is what they're saying true?"

Xiao Longnu nodded her head and said, "I don't know, maybe... maybe its true."

Feelings of condescension towards Xiao Longnu gathered inside Guo Fu and she left with a snort and did not turn back.

During the fight, Yin and Zhao both heard someone talking outside their room; after a clashing of weapons, the two separated and leapt back and both asked at the same time, "Who's there?"

Xiao Longnu said slowly, "Me."

Yin Zhiping trembled all over and asked with a shaking voice, "Who's me?"

Xiao Longnu replied, "Xiao Longnu!"

Once those three words came out, not only did Yin Zhiping freeze, Zhao Zhijing did so as well. That day at the Heroes' Feast of Da Xingguan, just one stance of hers allowed her to place a palm on his chest; the resulting injury was serious and it took him days to completely recover. There was no way he could defend himself against her. He could never have guessed that Xiao Longnu would be in Xiangyang as well; all the insults that he had just said were most likely heard by her. He was scared witless and was thinking, "How am I going to get out alive?"

Yin Zhiping was shocked as well but he was not thinking about how to escape, instead, he stretched out his hand and pushed open the window. Beside the flower bushes stood a silent, somber girl in white; it was the person who had filled his thoughts during the day and his dreams at night, the most enchanting girl in the world, Xiao Longnu!

Yin Zhiping replied in disbelief, "It's you?"

Xiao Longnu replied, "Yes, it's me. What you two said just now, is it true?"

Yin Zhiping nodded his head, "Yes! Just kill me!" He turned his sword towards her and handed it to her through the window.

Xiao Longnu's eyes lit up, her sorrow had reached its peak, her anger had met its limit, she felt that even if she killed a thousand people, or even ten thousand, she would no longer be the pure and chaste girl she once was. She could no longer love Yang Guo as deeply as she did before. When she saw the sword through the window, she did not take it and just looked at the two of them with uncertainty. She really could not decide on what to do.

Zhao Zhijing saw his chance had come, the girl seemed lost in her mind right now, if he doesn't take this chance to escape, when could he? He grabbed Yin Zhiping's arm and said with a snicker, "Let's go, let's go now, it looks like she can't bear to kill you!" He pulled hard and staggered out of the door. Yin Zhiping's mind was completely elsewhere, his body put up no resistance and he followed. Zhao Zhijing utilized his lightness kung fu and ran. Yin Zhiping had allowed himself to be pulled by him but after a few li, he himself started to use his own lightness kung fu. Both of them had begun practicing martial arts before Guo Jing had started. As soon as they put effort into it, they soon arrived at the gates in the eastern part of the city.

There were a few Beggar Clan members patrolling the area by the gates. The leader of the group recognized the two and knew they were eminent members of the Quanzhen sect. When it came to status, they were Guo Jing's peers. When he heard Zhao Zhijing say that they had to leave the city due to urgent business, he immediately allowed the gates to be opened. The gates were opened just wide enough for one person to exit and the two of them rushed out of the city at once. The Beggar Clan member praised, "Excellent lightness kung fu!" Just as he was about to close the gates, a white blur passed his eyes, it seemed that someone else had left the city. In shock, he said, "What?" The person was long gone. As he went to take a look from the gates, the dawn was just breaking, he could only see within sixty or seventy

feet, so how could he see who was there? He turned around to ask the others but no one saw anything. He narrowed his eyes and cursed, "Must have been a ghost!" He had been working tirelessly the past few days; it must have been his eyes playing tricks on him.

Yin and Zhao did not dare stop and only after running a few li from the city did they slow their steps. Zhao Zhijing used his sleeve to wipe the sweat from his forehead and called out, "Damn, that was close!" He turned around and looked back. His knees went limp and he nearly fell to the ground. What he saw, about a hundred feet behind them, was a girl in white, looking at them fixated. If it wasn't Xiao Longnu, who else could it be?

Zhao Zhijing was frightened at what he saw, he let out a 'no'. He had thought that they had left her behind long ago, but who knew that she was following behind them without making a sound; he himself did not notice it. He immediately grabbed Yin Zhiping's arm and ran.

He ran over one hundred feet in one breath but when he turned his head back once again, Xiao Longnu was still in sight, following closely behind them with a gap of around thirty or forty feet between them. Zhao Zhijing did not know what to do; he just lowered his head and ran with all his might. He did not dare to keep on checking whether Xiao Longnu was there or not because each time he did, his heart would suffer a shock and his legs became weaker as a result. He said, "Apprentice brother Yin, she could kill us right here right now if she wanted to, she must be up to something."

Yin Zhiping asked in confusion, "Up to something?"

Zhao Zhijing said, "From what I can tell, it looks like she wants to capture us and then reveal what you did in front of the world's heroes. This will ruin the reputation of the Quanzhen sect forever."

Yin Zhiping's heart skipped a beat, he no longer cared about his life, if Xiao Longnu wanted to kill him, he would not retaliate. He had been in the tutelage of Qiu Chuji since he was young and he loved his teacher; he couldn't let the reputation of the world renowned Quanzhen sect be tarnished by his hands. As he thought about this, his spine broke out in a cold sweat. He increased his efforts and ran shoulder to shoulder with Zhao Zhijing.

The two picked pathless grounds to run through. Sometimes, they would take a peek back but still, Xiao Longnu would still be there, just a few zhangs (1 zhang=3.3 meters / 10+ feet) away from them at all times. The Ancient Tomb's lightness kung fu is unmatched in the world; following the two would not take much effort but she really did not know what she wanted to do. All she could do was to keep the two within her sight.

The two of them had already been frightened and confused when they first saw Xiao Longnu, but after seeing her follow them like a shadow, they couldn't help themselves from conjuring up worse and worse scenarios as to what Xiao Longnu was planning for them. They became even more frightened. From dawn to noon, and from noon to the afternoon, running ten or so hours like this non-stop was something the two could not keep up even if the two had profound internal energy. They were out of breath and struggling and were now a lot slower than before. It was deep into the day and the air was hot and the two were soaked in sweat. After a while, the two were hungry and thirsty. They soon came to a brook and thought, "Even if I get captured, I can't do anything about it." They threw themselves down beside the brook and drank.

Xiao Longnu strolled casually to the brook and she too took a few mouthfuls of water. In the crystal clear running water of the brook was an image of a girl in white, a picture of beauty,

an image of the Ling Bo Goddess. Xiao Longnu's heart felt empty and she forgot about her state of mind for the moment and plucked a flower from the brook's bank. She placed it into her hair above her ear and stared at the reflection in the water, her mind a blank.

The two men were drinking and glancing over at her at the same time. Seeing that it appeared that she was preoccupied by something else and looked as if she had completely forgotten about her intentions, the two signaled to each other with their eyes and quietly got up. They silently made their way behind Xiao Longnu and moved away slowly. After looking back a few times to see her still standing by the brook, the two quickly sped up their steps and ran. Not long after, they came to a main road.

The two of them thought that this time, they'd finally managed to escape her; but Yin Zhiping took a glance over his shoulder and saw otherwise. Xiao Longnu was still following them.

Yin Zhiping's face became grey and called out, "Alas, it's no use! Apprentice brother Zhao; just let her do what she wants!" He stopped running.

Zhao Zhijing was furious and shouted, "You deserve to die; why should I die with you?" He pulled his arm to take him with him but Yin Zhiping did not want to run anymore. Zhao Zhijing was frightened and angry at the same time; he raised his palm and struck his face.

Yin Zhiping said angrily, "Hitting me again?"

Xiao Longnu felt that it was extremely odd when she saw the two of them suddenly start to fight once again.

Right at this time, two horses came galloping towards them. The riders were Mongolian dispatchers. A thought came into

Zhao Zhijing's head and he quietly said, "Snatch the horses! We'll pretend to fight but don't let Xiao Longnu know what we are going to do." He then chopped forward with a palm. Yin Zhiping raised his arm to block and sent out a palm of his own. Zhao Zhijing took a few steps back and the two gradually moved towards the centre of the road. With the road blocked, the Mongolians reigned in their horses and shouted. Yin and Zhao suddenly leapt up and pulled the Mongolians to the ground. They then mounted the horses and galloped north.

Both these horses were top class steeds and they galloped with great speed. When the two turned back to see that Xiao Longnu was no longer behind them, they finally managed a sigh of relief. After traveling over thirty li (15km / 9+ miles) or so, they reached a three-forked road.

Zhao Zhijing said, "She saw us head north, we'll change directions and head east instead." He pulled his reigns to the right and they headed along the easterly road. By nightfall, they had reached a small town.

After running all day, the two were extremely tired and hungry. They immediately found a restaurant and ordered a plate of beef and a few jin (grams) of pancakes.

Zhao Zhijing sat down and calmed himself. But fear still lingered in his heart as he recalled the day's events. Xiao Longnu had been following them all day yet why had she yet to make a move on them? Yin Zhiping's face was grey as ash, his head was lowered and it seemed that his mind drifted away. The beef and pancakes soon arrived but just as they were picking up the chopsticks to eat, sounds of horses neighing and people shouting arose from outside the restaurant.

Someone shouted, "Who do those horses belong to? Why are they here?" There was a Mongolian accent behind those

words.

Zhao Zhijing stood up and went to the entrance. He saw a Mongolian Sergeant with a group of seven or eight soldiers pointing at the horses that Zhao Zhijing and Yin Zhiping had ridden. The waiter at the restaurant was frightened and bowed to the Mongolian as he said, "Sir...Sir!"

Zhao Zhijing's anger had been building up all day after being chased by Xiao Longnu, he longed for a release to his tension; when he saw the Mongolians, he immediately went up to them and shouted, "The horses belong to me! What about it?"

The Sergeant said, "Where did you get them from?"

Zhao Zhijing said, "They're mine! What is it to you?"

By this time, all the land to the north of Xiangyang had fallen into Mongolian hands, all the Han were being oppressed by the Mongolians. Who would dare raise their voice to a Mongolian like this? The Mongolian saw that Zhao Zhijing looked a bit shifty and he had a sword at his waist, he was suspicious of him and said, "Did you buy them or steal them?"

Zhao Zhijing shouted, "What are you talking about? I reared these horses myself."

The Sergeant signaled with his hand and ordered, "Get him!" Seven or eight armed Mongolians encircled them.

Zhao Zhijing placed his hand on his sword handle and shouted, "What's your problem?"

The Mongolian Sergeant laughed coldly and said, "Horse thief! You've really got guts, these horses belong to the Mongolian army, are you going to admit now?" He then went up to the horses and moved their tails to the side to reveal a

Mongolian brand. All Mongolian horses had a brand on them to distinguish which camp they belong to. Zhao Zhijing stole these horses from some Mongolians, how would he know about this? When he saw the mark he became silent but continued to argue, "Who said they belong to the Mongolian army? I like to mark my horses, is that a crime?"

The Sergeant was furious; throughout his travels to the south he had never met such a brazen fellow. He took a step forward and reached out to grab Zhao Zhijing by his clothing. Zhao Zhijing bent his left arm and grabbed the Mongolian's wrist. Then he sent out his right palm and grabbed the Mongolian from behind before lifting him up and swinging him around his head three times before throwing him. The Sergeant was tossed away and landed in a porcelain shop. Non-stop sounds of smashing were heard as shelves of porcelain plates and bowls came crashing down. The sharp debris sliced up the Mongolian Sergeant and he was bleeding all over. He was unable to get up amongst the debris. The other soldiers went to help him; some moved the shelves and debris away while others helped him up. They no longer cared about trying to capture the horse thief.

Zhao Zhijing laughed out loud and walked back inside the restaurant to continue his meal. However, all the towns shops had closed and were boarded up as a result of the clash and all the customers that were in the restaurant had long ago cleared out. Everyone thought that with the Mongolians' malicious nature, surely they would be back to wash the town in blood. Zhao Zhijing had a few more bites of his food when the owner of the restaurant came up to him and suddenly dropped to the floor and started to bow to him. Zhao Zhijing knew that owner was afraid of the trouble that he would bring so he stood up and laughed, "Don't worry, we've eaten enough, we'll go immediately."

The owner's face became even greyer with fright and continued to bow to him.

Yin Zhiping said, "He's afraid that once we've left, the Mongolians will be back for us." He had always been a thoughtful and a strong man; it was only because of his mad love for Xiao Longnu that led him to his actions. His method of approach to everyday problems surpassed Zhao Zhijing in everyway and it was because of this that Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji and the others wanted to pass on the sect's leadership to him. He suddenly had a thought and said, "Bring me the best food and wine, we'll take responsibility for what we've done, why are you afraid?" The owner picked himself up and agreed compliantly before giving out orders to bring them food and wine.

The Mongolian Sergeant was injured pretty badly and had to be carried to his horse.

Zhao Zhijing laughed, "Brother Yin, after what we've been through today, we've really got to let off some steam once we're back."

Yin Zhiping gave a grunt and looked on as the Mongolians left. After steadying their nerves, everyone in the restaurant brought food and wine to them and filled up a table.

The two of them ate for a while when suddenly Yin Zhiping got up and raised his palm, sending the waiter who was serving him to the floor. The owner was alarmed and quickly walked forward and smiled, "This idiot doesn't know what he's doing, please don't get mad sir..." Before he finished, Yin Zhiping had kicked out with his left leg and lightly kicked him to the floor.

Zhao Zhijing thought he had lost it and called, "Brother Yin... you..."

Yin Zhiping flipped a table and sent bowls and plates smashing to the floor before immediately sending another two waiters to the floor. He then sealed everyone's accupoints before bringing his hands together and said, "When the Mongolians come and see you in this state, they won't vent their anger on you, do you understand? You should add a few injuries here and there as well." He then unsealed everyone's accupoints.

They suddenly understood and thought it was a great plan. They then started to beat each other up and tear each other's clothes, eyes were blackened and noses were bruised. Not long after, the sounds of hoofs from many galloping horses could be heard on the street's pavement. Everyone in the restaurant fell to the floor and cried out, "No, please stop!" "Mercy...have mercy!" "Please sir, I beg you!"

The horses did indeed stop outside the restaurant. Four Mongolian soldiers entered and were followed by a tall skinny Tibetan monk and a short dark man. This dark man had both his legs removed and was supporting himself with crutches.

When the soldiers saw the state of the restaurant they frowned and shouted, "Hurry up and bring us some food, we're in a rush."

The owner was taken aback by this and thought, "So these guys are from another group. What am I going to do when those other soldiers get back?" Just as he was hesitating, some of the soldiers struck at his head with their horse whips. The owner took the blows and complied but struggled to get up. One of the other waiters served and set places for them.

The Tibetan monk was Jinlun Fawang; the short dark man was Nimoxing. That day, after both of them had fallen victim to the 'Soul Freezing Needles', the two of them struggled outside the cave and fell off a cliff. Luckily, the sides of the

cliff had a large tree growing from it and Fawang managed to grab onto it just in time. Nimoxing was in a dazed state by now but he still clutched onto Fawang. Fawang took a look at his surroundings before he gathered his strength in his left arm and pushed; the two of them fell down towards the bushes at the bottom of the cliff. They rolled down a steep hill for around a hundred feet, only stopping once they'd reached the bottom of the valley. The two of them were scratched all over by thorns.

Fawang flipped over and used his minor grappling techniques on Nimoxing's arm and shouted, "Are you going to release me or not?"

In his dazed state, Nimoxing had no more strength to resist Fawang's pull; his left arm loosened but his right arm was still clutching onto the back of Fawang.

Fawang laughed coldly, "Your legs have contracted a lethal poison, why aren't you trying to save yourself and instead still trying to struggle with me?"

These two sentences made Nimoxing look down at his legs. His lower legs had swollen up badly, if he didn't do something about it soon, his life would be in danger. He clenched his teeth and took out the Iron Snake weapon from his waist and cut his lower legs off. Blood poured out copiously and he passed out. Fawang admired this steely behavior and now that he was a cripple and no longer a threat to him, he decided to help him. He sealed his knees' 'Crooked Spring' accupoints and his thigh's 'Five Li' accupoints to stop the bleeding. He then took out some medicine for external wounds and tore off Nimoxing's outer garment to bandage his legs.

A lot of Indian martial artists have practiced pain resisting arts such as sleeping on a bed of nails or sitting on a seat of knives. Nimoxing was well versed in such arts and as soon as

his wounds stopped bleeding he awoke and sat up saying; "Good, since you've saved me, we'll forget all our past feuds."

Fawang showed a bitter smile, "Though you've lost your legs, the poison in your body has been cleansed, but I'm still in danger." So he sat down with his legs folded and circulated his chi, slowly forcing out the poison from his foot. It took him an exhausting two hours to force just a minute amount of the poison out.

The two of them rested in the remote valley for a few days. Fawang used his advanced internal energy to force the rest of the poison out and Nimoxing's wounds no longer bled. Nimoxing made two crutches from some tree branches and the two made their way out of the valley. They soon came across a group of Mongolian soldiers and they made their way back to Khubilai's camp. On the way back, they came across the same town that Yin and Zhao were in.

When Zhao Zhijing and Yin Zhiping saw Fawang, they looked at each other in shock. They both were present at the Heroes' Gathering at Da Xingguan and saw Fawang demonstrate his amazing martial arts. Both remembered when his disciples Da'erba and Huo Dou attacked the Chongyang Palace years ago; even some of the Quanzhen Masters found them difficult to contend with. They were filled with fear of this encounter. The two signaled to each other with their eyes and wanted to slip away.

That day at Da Xingguan there were hundreds or thousands of heroes attending the gathering, Zhao and Yin may have recognized Fawang but Fawang did not recognize them. Though Fawang saw that the restaurant was in a rough state, but since it was during a time of war, this wasn't anything out of the ordinary. This fruitless attack on Xiangyang that ended with defeat was not going to be his greatest moment

in front of Khubilai. All he was thinking about at the moment was how to cover it up; he didn't care about the Taoists who were eating their meal.

Just at this time, there was a commotion outside the restaurant, and group of Mongolian soldiers came bursting in. As soon as they saw Yin and Zhao, they all roared and went forward to capture them. Yin Zhiping saw that Fawang was sitting near the door, if they dashed out past him, most probably he would intervene so he said quietly, "Exit through the backdoor!" He pushed a table and bowls and plates, causing a sudden noise as they crashed to the floor. The two of them leapt back and ran towards the backdoor.

Just as he was about to make it to the backyard, Yin Zhiping glanced over at Fawang and saw him holding a cup. Thinking to himself, "He's ignoring what was going on in the restaurant." He was delighted and thought, "He's not going to interfere." Suddenly, a black blur came at him; the short Western regions person had come and was waving his left hand, striking out at the heads of Yin and Zhao with his crutch. Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing had never seen this person before, but seeing his swift movements and powerful attacks, they immediately lowered their shoulders and dodged to the side.

Hitting thin air, Nimoxing cried out 'Oh', these two Taoists weren't weaklings and he was slightly surprised. He used his left crutch as a support and then attacked with his right crutch, blocking the Taoists path. The two of them unsheathed their swords and attacked from both sides, trying to force him back and make a path for an escape.

Though Nimoxing's martial arts were stronger than that of Yin and Zhao, he had lost his legs only just recently and had yet to fully recover. Fighting with his crutches against the two would require at least one crutch to remain on the

ground at all times. A few stances later, he could no longer keep it up. Fawang walked forward slowly and saw Zhao Zhijing's sword going for Nimoxing's chest. Nimoxing raised his crutch to block the attack and as he did so, Yin Zhiping went for his right side. This stance was extremely vicious, Nimoxing had to abandon his crutch and push back if he wanted to avoid it. Fawang took a stride forward and met with Nimoxing's flying body; Fawang supported him with his left arm and then placed his right hand on Nimoxing's arm. Nimoxing's crutch and Zhao Zhijing's sword had yet to separate at this point. Fawang transferred his internal energy through the crutch. Zhao Zhijing felt his arm shaking violently and half his upper body began to grow hot, a 'dang' sound was heard as he dropped his sword.

Nimoxing's internal energy was lacking but his changes in stance were extremely swift. As soon as he saw Zhao Zhijing's sword fall from his hands, he immediately swung his crutch towards Yin Zhiping and trapped his sword. Fawang touched Nimoxing's arm once again. Yin Zhiping saw what had happened to Zhao Zhijing previously so he immediately circulated his internal energy to counter the attack. Fawang's internal energy had both softness and hardness within, after a 'kala' sound, the sword broke, leaving Yin Zhiping with a broken sword in his hand. Fawang lowered Nimoxing to the ground lightly and then stretched out his hands, placing them on the shoulders of the two. He smiled, "Why come to arms with strangers? With your martial arts, you two must be first class fighters of the central plains, why don't we sit down and have a chat?"

There didn't seem to be any malicious intent in his movements but once his hands touched them, the two could not move. All they felt was a force like a thousand jin (500kg / 1kg=2.2lbs) pressing down on their shoulders. All they could do was try to circulate their internal energy to resist the force; how could they even reply? If they opened their

mouths, their internal energy would disperse and their bones from their shoulder to their waist would surely be crushed.

The soldiers who rushed in had by now completely surrounded them. The leader of the pack was a Noyan and he recognized Fawang, who was the First Protector of Mongolia and commanded great respect from Khubilai. He immediately went up to Fawang and bowed, "Your eminence, these two Taoists stole our horses and beat up our soldiers, thank you for your eminence's help..." Before he finished, he glanced over at Yin Zhiping a few times and suddenly asked, "Is this the person Yin Zhiping?"

Yin Zhiping nodded but he did not recognize this man.

Fawang loosened his grip on the two and reduced the force he was exerting and thought, "These two Taoists are only forty years of age or so yet their internal energy is so pure."

The Mongolian Noyan said, "Does Master Yin not recognize me? Nineteen years ago, we were eating roast lamb in the desert, I'm Sa Duo."

Yin Zhiping looked at him carefully and said with delight, "Oh, yes, that's right! I didn't recognize you with that beard!"

Sa Duo smiled, "I've ridden thousands of li (1 li = 0.5km) all over the lands; all my hair has gone white yet you haven't changed much. No wonder Genghis Khan claimed practicing Taoists are immortal." He turned to Fawang and said, "Your eminence, this Taoist has visited the Western regions in the past, he was a guest of Genghis Khan, it could be said that he's one of us." Fawang nodded and released his hands from their shoulders.

Years ago, Genghis Khan had invited Qiu Chuji to Western regions to see him, hoping he could learn the secrets of immortality. Qiu Chuji traveled thousands of li and took

nineteen disciples with him. Yin Zhiping was his senior student so he of course was within the group. Genghis Khan sent two hundred men to accompany Qiu Chuji and his disciples. Sa Duo was just a lowly soldier at that time and he was within that group; that is why he was able to recognize Yin Zhiping. He had fought for over twenty years and his deeds were rewarded with a promotion to the position of Noyan. He was delighted with this unexpected meeting with Yin Zhiping. He had great respect for Yin Zhiping and laughed off what happened with the horses. Sa Duo asked him about the well being of Qiu Chuji and the others that were on the expedition, and as he talked the past, his pride became visible.

Fawang had also heard about Qiu Chuji before and knew that he was Quanzhen's best fighter. He saw that Yin Zhiping's and Zhao Zhijing's martial arts weren't bad and thought that the reputation of the Quanzhen is deserved. We were lucky that he was able to strike first and take the initiative, otherwise, had a fight really broken out, it would take him at least twenty or thirty stances to beat them.

Suddenly there was a blur at the door and a girl in white entered. Fawang, Nimoxing, Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing were all alarmed to see that this girl was Xiao Longnu. Only Nimoxing had no fear of her and said, "The Passionless Valley's bride, greetings!"

Xiao Longnu nodded slightly and then sat down in the corner at a small table. She ignored everyone and quietly ordered some mushroom noodles from a waiter.

The faces of Yin and Zhao were white one minute and green the next; both of them were agitated. Fawang was afraid that Yang Guo would soon arrive; there was nothing that he feared in the world except those two's 'Pure Heart of Jade Maiden' swordplay. The three of them were occupied with

their thoughts and ate without saying a word. Yin and Zhao were full a long time ago but if they suddenly went quiet, the others would be suspicious of them, so they ate without stopping so as to occupy their mouths.

Sa Duo however was in a joyous mood, he asked, "Master Yin, have you ever seen our Fourth Prince?"

Yin Zhiping shook his head.

Sa Dou continued, "Khubilai is the Fourth Prince son of the Fourth Prince Tou Lei. He is wise and compassionate and he has the respect of everyone in the camp. I was just on my way to report to him; if you two have nothing to do, why not come along and meet him?"

Yin Zhiping shook his head with other things on his mind. Zhao Zhijing suddenly had a thought and asked, "Reverend, are you going to see the Fourth Prince as well?"

Fawang said, "Yes! The prince is a real man of the world, you two must meet him."

Zhao Zhijing said with joy, "Good, we'll go with you and Sa Dou." He patted Yin Zhiping's leg beneath the table and made a signal with his eyes to him.

Sa Duo said with delight "Good...very good!"

Yin Zhiping's intelligence is normally higher than that of Zhao Zhijing but as soon as he saw Xiao Longnu, he had drifted off into his own world. Only after a long while did he get Zhao Zhijing's plan. He wanted to rely on Fawang's protection to escape from Xiao Longnu.

Everyone quickly finished their meals and all left at the same time, making their way on horseback. Fawang was relieved to see that Yang Guo was still nowhere to be seen and thought, "The Quanzhen sect is one of the central plains largest sects,

if I can enlist their help to aid Mongolia, it would be a great achievement. I at least have something to report back to his Highness tomorrow." He then tried to convey his intent of enlisting them through his words to the Taoists.

The sky was now getting dark, after riding for a while, the sounds of hoofs could be heard from behind them. They looked back and saw Xiao Longnu following slowly behind them on a donkey.

Fawang was alarmed and thought, "She can't beat me by herself so why is she being so brash and following us? Could it be that Yang Guo is following along in secret as well?" He had just met Yin and Zhao and did not want to lose any face in front of them so he pretended that he did not know that Xiao Longnu was following them.

The group rode for half a night before they reached a forest. Sa Duo ordered his men to take rest. About a hundred feet away, Xiao Longnu too had gotten off her donkey and sat down in the forest. The more secretive her actions were, the harder Fawang concentrated; he did not dare to make a rash move. Zhao Zhijing remembered that Nimoxing had greeted Xiao Longnu, but did not know what ties Fawang had with her. He dare not look at her. After resting for an hour, everyone got on their horses once again and after they left the forest, the sounds of hoofs could again be heard as Xiao Longnu followed once again.

Day had broken and still, Xiao Longnu was following them with a distance of about a hundred feet between them.

By now they had reached an open plain. Fawang looked all around and saw that there were no signs of anyone else. Evil intent stirred in him as he thought, "I have been invincible all my life, yet as soon as I stepped onto the central plains, I was defeated by those kids Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu's twin swordplay. She's following me non-stop and must be up to

something. Why don't I attack out of the blue and kill her? Even if she has help, they'll be too late. Once this girl dies, no one in the world can threaten me." He had made his mind up and just as he was about to reign in his horse the sound of bells ringing could be heard in front of them. A dust cloud could be seen a few li in front of them as horses galloped towards them.

Fawang regretted his missed opportunity, "If I knew that her help would arrive now, I would have killed her long ago."

Suddenly, Sa Duo cried out, "Oh! That's strange."

Fawang saw that a group of four horses were riding towards them and the first horse on the right was carrying a flag. On the flag pole were seven different types of white wool fluttering in the wind; it was Khubilai's banner yet from afar, there appeared to be no rider on the horse.

Sa Duo called out, "His Highness is here!" He rode forwards and about a distance of half a li from the horses, he got off and stood in a respectful stance.

Fawang thought, "Since his Highness is here, it would not be appropriate to kill the girl now." If Khubilai saw him fight a girl on her own, Khubilai would look down upon him. He rode forward slowly and saw that in the group of four horses sat a man in midair. The man had white hair, a white beard with a big smile on his face; it was none other than Zhou Botong.

From afar Zhou Botong called out, "Good, good, the big monk is here and the dark shortie is here, we meet again. Oh, and that young girl is here as well."

Fawang was curious; this person was full of tricks but how was he able to sit in midair? Once the horses got closer, he was able to see what was happening. The horses were

holding a makeshift net made from ropes on their backs and he was sitting on the net.

Zhou Botong had always kept away from the Chongyang Palace and very rarely saw the Quanzhen Masters; because of this, Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing did not recognize him. Though they have heard from the Masters that they have a Grand Martial Uncle who was a free wanderer, they had not heard from him for a long time and thought probably he must have passed away. The thought that this could be him had never entered their minds. Years ago at that great battle at the Smokey Rain Pavilion the place was covered with fog and no one could see anything. Zhou Botong was there; although Yin Zhiping had heard of him, he did not see him.

Fawang frowned; this person's martial arts are extremely high, it would be best not to get mixed up with him. He asked, "Is his Highness behind you?"

Zhou Botong pointed behind him and laughed, "About thirty or forty li back is his tent. Hey monk, a word of advice, I don't think it's the best time to see him right now."

Fawang said, "Why?"

Zhou Botong said, "Right now, he's pissed off. If you go see him now, you'll probably lose your bald head."

Fawang said angrily, "Rubbish! Why would his Highness be angry?"

Zhou Botong pointed to the flag and laughed, "I stole his Highness' flag, why shouldn't he be angry?"

Fawang was shocked and asked, "Why did you steal it?"

Zhou Botong said, "Do you know Guo Jing?"

Fawang nodded and said, "So?

Zhou Botong said, "He's my sworn brother. I haven't seen him in years; I miss him a lot so I decided to go see him. He's fighting the Mongols at Xiangyang at the moment so I went and stole the Mongol's royal banner to give it to him as a gift."

Fawang was shocked and thought this was terrible; they are unable to break Xiangyang down and now, the royal banner has been stolen. This would bring great disgrace to the Mongols; he must come up with a way to get the banner back at all costs.

Zhou Botong shouted and the horses rushed forward, galloping like the wind in a westerly direction before making a circle and returning. The banner fluttered in the wind. Zhou Botong stood up with four reigns in his hands as he rode across the open plains, he looked like a great General.

He looked extremely pleased with himself and as he got close to them, he shouted and the horses immediately stopped. His hands must be extremely powerful to be able to control the four horses as he pleased.

Zhou Botong laughed, "Hey monk, how're my riding skills?"

Fawang gave a thumbs up and praised, "Brilliant, absolutely brilliant!" In his mind, he was trying to come up with a way to get the flag back.

Zhou Botong waved his left hand and laughed, "Big monk, little girl, the Old Urchin's going!"

When Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing heard the 'Old Urchin', they both yelled out, "Grand Martial Uncle?" They both leapt off their horses.

Yin Zhiping said, "Is this Senior Zhou of the Quanzhen sect?"

Zhou Botong's eyes rolled around and said, "Hmm, what's this? You better start your kowtows."

The two of them were about to greet him but when they heard his words, they were shocked and were afraid that they were mistaken.

Zhou Botong asked, "Who is your Master?"

Yin Zhiping replied respectfully, "Zhao Zhijing is the disciple of the Jade Sun Elder Wang; I am the disciple of the Eternal Spring Elder Qiu."

Zhou Botong said, "Hmm, seems like each generation is getting worse and worse, and it looks like you two are bad characters." Suddenly he kicked out with both his legs and his shoes went flying forward towards them.

Yin Zhiping saw that the shoe was coming at him quite slowly without much force; even if it struck him in the face it wouldn't hurt, he dare not lose his manners and kept bowing. But Zhao Zhijing stretched out his hand to catch the shoe. But who knew that when they arrived within three feet of them, the shoes suddenly curled back. Zhao Zhijing grabbed empty air as the left shoe turned right and the right shoe turned left. The shoes circled back and crossed each other and went back to Zhou Botong. Zhou Botong stretched out his feet and the shoes slipped on.

Though this was just a trick, without extremely profound internal energy, it would be impossible to kick the shoes with the right weight and force like this. Jinlun Fawang and Nimoxing had seen him throw some spearheads in Khubilai's tent that dropped midway in their flight. The shoes were kicked off with the same type of skill except that an extra back force was added. That was why they weren't shocked when they saw this. But when Zhao Zhijing stretched out his hand and missed, he was shocked. With his martial arts, even

the most lethal projectile would be plucked out of the air by him yet he wasn't able to catch this slow shoe. He no longer had any doubts and did as Yin Zhiping did and bowed, saying, "Disciple Zhao Zhijing greets great Martial Uncle."

Zhou Botong laughed, "Qiu Chuji and Wang Chuyi's eyes must be bad; none of their disciples are up to it. Just forget it, who wants kowtows from you?" He roared, "Onwards!" The four horses galloped forward.

Fawang leapt off his horse and blurred towards the horses' path. He called out, "Wait!" Each of his palms was pressed onto one horse each. The horses were advancing forward at this time but this press by Fawang actually made them move two steps back.

Zhou Botong was furious and shouted, "Big monk, do you want a fight? The Old Urchin hasn't found a worthy opponent for years; my fists are getting a bit itchy. Come now, let's have a few rounds." He loved martial arts and in recent years, his martial arts have been getting better and better; finding a worthy opponent was an extremely difficult task. He knew Fawang's martial arts were of a high standard, someone worthy to exchange stances with, so he got off his horse ready to fight.

Fawang waved his hand and said, "I never fight with shameless scoundrels. Fight if you want, I won't."

Zhou Botong was angry and said, "You dare call me a shameless scoundrel?"

Fawang said, "You knew that I wasn't at the camp so you went and stole the banner, wouldn't you call that shameless? You knew that you weren't a match for me so you waited until you were sure that I wasn't there before you sneakily stole the flag. Ha-ha, Zhou Botong, looks like you don't have any pride."

Zhou Botong said, "Fine, we'll know whether I'm a match for you after we've had a fight."

Fawang shook his head and said, "I said I don't fight with shameless scoundrels, you can't force me to fight. My knuckles are very proud, once they hit any shameless scoundrels, the knuckles would be covered with a stench that'll hang around for three years and six months."

Zhou Botong shouted, "What do you want to do?"

Fawang said, "Hand the banner back to me and then come back later tonight to steal it again while I'll guard it. No matter what method you use, if you are able to steal it again, I'll give my respects to you as a great hero."

Zhou Botong could never resist challenges and the harder it was, the greater the urge to do it. He immediately shot the flag back to Fawang and said, "Catch, I'll be back for it tonight."

Fawang stretched out his hand and caught the flag pole only to realize the great force behind the throw, he quickly circulated his internal energy to resist but in the end, he still had to take two steps back before he steadied himself.

The horses had been pressing forward but were held back by Fawang; now, Fawang's hold on them loosened. All the horses suddenly leapt forward at least twenty feet and galloped ahead. Everyone watched as Zhou Botong and the horses raced away further and further into the distance until they were small dots.

Fawang's mind was occupied for a while before he passed the flag over to Sa Duo and said, "Let's make a move."

Fawang knew that Zhou Botong's actions were hard to fathom, how was he going to win? He thought for a while on the horseback but couldn't come up with anything. By

chance, he looked around and saw Yin and Zhao were speaking quietly to each other and were constantly looking back at Xiao Longnu with fear on their faces. He thought, "Could it be that she has come for them?" So he decided to investigate and said, "Brother Yin, do you know Miss Long?"

Yin Zhiping's face changed and he replied, "Hmm." Fawang knew that there more to this so he continued, "You two have offended her and now she's looking for you to get her own back, right? That girl is extremely powerful; to offend her is not a good idea." He had no idea what was going on but from the fearful look on the two's faces, he made a guess, tested the two, and managed to get the right answer straight away.

Zhao Zhijing took this opportunity to reply, "She has offended you as well; that day at the 'Heroes' gathering she beat you, you must avenge what she did to you."

Fawang scoffed, "You know as well?"

Zhao Zhijing replied, "Everyone in the world of Wulin knows about this."

Fawang thought, "This Taoist is not so simple. I want him to help me defeat my enemy yet he's trying to use me to help him escape his predicament." He continued, "These two men are not your average men, if I just leave it out in the open, things will go a lot easier." So he said, "That Miss Long wants to kill you but you can't beat her so you seek my protection, right?"

Zhao Zhijing replied furiously, "Do I look like someone who needs to rely on others to save myself? Besides, the good Reverend here may not be able to beat her."

Fawang was shocked by his proud reply and thought, "Could my assumptions be wrong?" He could not tell what the two were thinking so he smiled, "Her twin swordplay with Yang

Guo is indeed extremely powerful. But she's alone right now; it would be extremely easy for me to kill her."

Zhao Zhijing shook his head, "I'm afraid it's not as easy as it sounds. Everyone in the Jianghu world says that Jinlun Fawang was defeated by Xiao Longnu."

Fawang laughed, "I have meditated for years, so how could your words anger me?" From what Zhao Zhijing said, he knew that Zhao Zhijing was hoping that he would defeat Xiao Longnu for him. Before Zhou Botong arrived, he had planned on killing Xiao Longnu but, with the bet he made with Zhou Botong, he had a use for the two. If he killed Xiao Longnu, he no longer had any leverage over the two, so he cupped his hands and said, "Since it is so, I will make my way. After you've sorted out the matter with Xiao Longnu, please come and visit his Highness' camp." He pulled his reigns and rode forward.

Zhao Zhijing was getting anxious, he knew that as soon as Fawang leaves, Xiao Longnu would catch up with them and torture them. As he thought about the suffering that he had from the Jade Bees on Mount Zhongnan he couldn't stop himself from worrying. It appeared that this Tibetan monk possessed not only terrific martial arts but also a calculating mind that exceeded his own. Seeing Fawang ride ahead, he quickly caught up and called out, "Reverend, please wait! I am not familiar with the roads here; I will be indebted forever if Reverend would trouble himself to enlighten me."

When Fawang heard 'indebted forever', he smiled and thought, "It looks like it's the one named Zhao that has offended Miss Long, that's why he is so afraid, and it looks like it has nothing to do with the one named Yin." He said, "Fine, but I might need to trouble you later on."

Zhao Zhijing said quickly, "No matter what the Reverend requests, I will follow the order."

He and Fawang rode together and as they did so, Fawang asked about the situation at Quanzhen and Zhao Zhijing told all. Yin Zhiping followed behind in a daze.

Fawang said, "Oh, so Elder Ma no longer runs the sect because of old age. I hear that the current leader Elder Qiu is getting on as well."

Zhao Zhijing said, "Yes, Martial Uncle Qiu is already seventy years of age."

Fawang said, "So after Elder Qiu hands over the leadership, Elder Wang would be the leader." These words struck out at the thoughts of Zhao Zhijing, his face changed slightly and said, "My Master is also of an old age. In recent years, the Masters have been studying the ways of life; the matters of the sect are passed on mostly to my apprentice brother Yin."

Fawang saw that as he said this he had a slightly angry expression on his face and said quietly, "From what I see, though your apprentice brother Yin's martial arts are good, they are not as good as yours and when it comes to intelligence, yours is far superior. The important task of sect leader should fall to you."

These words had been hidden away in Zhao Zhijing's mind for seven or eight years now but he had never said it publicly. Hearing these words from Fawang, his anger was even more telling. By appointing Yin Zhiping as the head disciple of the third generation, the Quanzhen Masters are indicating they want him to be the next sect leader. At first, Zhao Zhijing was just jealous and couldn't accept it, but since he has managed to find a way to blackmail him he has been pondering ways to snatch the sect's leadership from him. Yin Zhiping's raping of Xiao Longnu broke major rules of the Quanzhen sect; if the Masters found out his life would be at risk. But Zhao Zhijing well knew that he was a reckless man and had never pleased the Quanzhen Masters. He did not get along with most of his

apprentice brothers so even if Yin Zhiping's name and reputation is tarnished, the title of sect leader would not fall to him. This is the reason why he had kept it to himself all this time.

Having figured out his thoughts, Fawang thought to himself, "If I help him get the sect's leadership, he will follow my orders completely. The Quanzhen sect has great influence and has followers everywhere; if I can enlist them to our side, it will greatly aid his Highness' task of invading the south. This would be a great achievement, probably even more so than killing Guo Jing." Fawang looked back and saw that Xiao Longnu was standing about a li away and was not advancing further. He thought, "With her there, those two Taoists will definitely fall for the bait."

Everyone entered the royal tent and Khubilai was in a bad temper over losing his royal flag. The royal flag is the army's lead, in a battle, the thousands and thousands of soldiers follow the flag's actions and it is an extremely important object. Losing the flag like this without anyone knowing what happened was like losing an important battle. Khubilai's mood changed when he saw Fawang enter the tent with the flag in his hand and quickly went up to greet him.

Khubilai had both knowledge and valor in abundance and had followed his ancestor Genghis Khan. When he heard Fawang introduce Yin and Zhao as Taoists from Quanzhen, he immediately welcomed them with open arms showing he appreciated great people. He forgot about the incident with the flag and immediately ordered a banquet for them. Yin Zhiping was not concentrating and was thinking only about Xiao Longnu. Zhao Zhijing had always respected people of importance, when he saw how Khubilai treated him, he was out of this world with delight.

Khubilai did not mention the failure to assassinate Guo Jing and instead kept on mentioning how loyal Nimoxing was. Because of his legs, he was invited to head the banquet. Khubilai and he drank with each other. Nimoxing was extremely touched and thought that no matter what Khubilai needed, he would do so without any qualms.

After the banquet, Fawang accompanied Yin and Zhao to their tent. Yin Zhiping's mind was tired and he went to sleep. Fawang said, "Brother Zhao, we have some idle time, let's take a walk."

From faraway, Zhao Zhijing saw Xiao Longnu sitting underneath a tree with her donkey tied to it. His face changed at the sight of her. Fawang pretended he did not see her and asked more about the situation at Quanzhen.

In Northern Song, there originally was only one Taoist sect; Zheng Yi had originated in Sanxi's Mountain of Dragons and Tigers, headed by Zhang Tianshi. After the invasion by the Jurchens, the Song moved south and in Hubei, three new Taoist sects emerged; Quanzhen, Dadao and Taiyi. The Quanzhen was the most successful and its members were heroic and came to the aid of the needy. During this time, the northern areas were in chaos, the citizens were suffering; they saw that there was no hope from the royal court and everyone saw the Quanzhen sect as their saviors. At that time, someone said, "The Central Plains are shifting, the Southern Song are weak. All the heroes of the world must join if they wish to defend the land. The Founder Chongyang, the Eternal Spring Elder Qiu, models to all, their unique sect's conduct influences all men of promise, bringing peace to the nation. It is the way of the heavens to have leaders like these." And so on. North of the great river during this time, the power of the Beggar Clan and the Quanzhen sect were sometimes greater than that of the authorities.

Zhao Zhijing saw that Fawang was treating him with great respect and was touched by this, whatever Fawang asked, he answered, telling him where the sect's influence lay and where its strongholds were.

The two talked and walked at the same time and soon reached a place where they were alone. Fawang sighed and said, "Reverend Zhao, for your sect to be what it is today is no mean feat. Please forgive me; I must say that Elders Ma, Qiu and Wang do not know what they are doing in this matter. How can they elect brother Yin as the next sect leader?"

Recently, Zhao Zhijing had been thinking about how he was going to wait until Yin was the sect leader and until all the Quanzhen Masters passed away before forcing Yin to hand over the leadership. But he was an impatient man, even if this was going to succeed, it would take years before it would happen. This reminder made him sigh and he looked at Xiao Longnu once again.

Fawang said, "I will take care of the matter concerning Miss Long, and there is no need to worry. The most important matter right now is to make sure the leadership of your sect does not fall into the wrong hands."

Zhao Zhijing became excited and said, "If Reverend can enlighten me on this matter then I will follow and be your aide for life."

Fawang raised his eyebrows and said clearly, "A gentleman's word is a promise; you cannot take back your word."

Zhao Zhijing said, "Of course."

Fawang said, "Fine, I'll guarantee you that you'll be the sect leader within half a year."

Zhao Zhijing was delighted to hear this, but he knew that it would be difficult to achieve this and still had some doubts.

Fawang said, "You don't believe me?"

Zhao Zhijing said, "I do, I do. The good Reverend is full of wisdom, he must have a plan."

Fawang said, "I have no ties with your sect; whoever becomes the sect leader is of no importance. But for some reason, when I saw you it was like seeing an old friend, I had to intervene."

Zhao Zhijing was excited and did not know what the best way was to express his thanks.

Fawang said, "The first step is that we must gain a strong supporter for you within the sect. Whose position is the highest within the sect?"

Zhao Zhijing said, "That is of course Grand Martial Uncle Zhou who we met today."

Fawang said, "Correct. If he agrees to support you, brother Yin would most likely have no chance."

Zhao Zhijing said with joy, "Yes, Martial Uncle Ma, Martial Uncle Qiu and my Master all have to call him Martial Uncle. Whatever he says must be respected. But what ingenious plan would you use to persuade Great Martial Uncle Zhou to support me."

Fawang said, "I made a bet with Zhou Botong today about stealing the royal flag. Do you think he's going to come?"

Zhao Zhijing said, "Of course he'll come."

Fawang said, "The flag will not be hoisted on the flag pole tonight, and we'll hide it in a secret place. The camp has thousands of tents, even if Zhou Botong has the ability to

move heaven and earth, there is no way he'll be able to find the flag in one night."

Zhao Zhijing said, "Yes!" But he was thinking, "This isn't the most honorable thing to do."

Fawang said, "You must be thinking, this isn't an honorable thing to do. But I'm just thinking of you." Zhao Zhijing looked at him and didn't understand what he meant.

Fawang patted his shoulder lightly and said, "I'll tell you where I hid the flag and then you'll go and tell Zhou Botong where the flag is and let him find it, how wonderful would that be?"

Zhao Zhijing said, "Yes, yes, that will definitely please Great Martial Uncle Zhou." But then he said, "But won't that mean you've lost the bet?"

Fawang said, "For friends, men like us can ignore a defeat here or there, what's so important about that?"

Zhao Zhijing was extremely touched by this and said, "I do not know how to express my thanks."

Fawang smiled, "Once you've got the support of Zhou Botong, with my help you'll be able to elect yourself as sect leader." He then pointed to the left and said, "Let's take a look over there."

About a li away from the camp were some small hills, in a short while they reached one of the hills. Fawang said, "We'll find a cave and hide the flag there." The first two hills they came across were open and bare without any caves there. On the third hill they found that it was covered with woodlands and there was cave after cave.

Fawang said, "This looks like the best place."

Between two large trees he saw a cave with a well-hidden entrance that was not easy to spot at a glance, he said, "Remember this place, I'll place the flag in there. Later on tonight, bring Zhou Botong here."

Zhao Zhijing kept on saying yes, he was filled with delight. He looked hard and long at the two trees thinking with these two trees as a marker, he will definitely remember the right cave. The two returned to the camp and did not mention this again.

After supper, Zhao Zhijing kept talking to Yin Zhiping. Yin Zhiping just stared and sometimes said a word here or there, not really replying. The sky was getting dark and the gong for the first hour sounded. Zhao Zhijing slipped away from the camp and sat beside a sandy hill. He saw the patrols and how heavily guarded the camp was and thought, "It really would be difficult to take just one step into this camp. Yet Great Martial Uncle Zhou came and went as he pleased when he took the flag; his abilities are unimaginable."

The sky above him was now dark blue, like a Mongolian tent that covered the plains. The stars were twinkling in the sky and the stars of the dipper were especially bright. He thought, "If Fawang's words are true, three months from now I'll be the leader of the Quanzhen sect; its three thousand branches and eighty thousand disciples will be under my command, ha-ha. Then it would be so easy to take the life of that punk Yang Guo." The more he thought about it, the more arrogant he became. He stood up and looked into the distance and made out that Xiao Longnu was still sitting underneath that same tree. He thought, "That Miss Long's beauty really is unmatched, even I feel something, no wonder apprentice brother Yin is so crazy about her. But how can those who want to achieve greatness let things like women get in the way?"

Just as he was feeling pleased with himself, he suddenly saw a black shadow coming from the west. The shadow was darting about within the camp and soon reached the flagpole. The person had a broad gown and large sleeves, his white beard was fluttering in the wind; Zhou Botong had arrived.

End of Chapter 24.

Chapter 25 - Domestic Strife, Foreign Aggression

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The spiders immediately set to work, climbing up, moving east, dropping low, and approaching west, hanging suspended, until they were able to create a network of webs in just a very short time. Xiao Long Nu and Zhou Bo Tong watched with interest as the spiders spun the web, yet it never occurred to either one of them to stop their progress. Only when the web reached about ten feet in diameter, covering the entire mouth of the cave, and the red-green venomous spiders start to crawl around did they look troubled.

Zhou Botong raised his head, searching the top of the flag pole, but finding no flag there, he could not help being startled. He'd thought that Jinlun Fawang would be hiding somewhere below, waiting to ambush him, then seize the opportunity to route him completely.

It was a smooth plan but not even ten thousand guesses could prepare him for this: the flag was not there. He looked around. The camp was filled with numerous tents. Yet, he must try to find it before leaving.

Zhao Zhijing was about to move forward to greet him but he changed his mind. He thought, "If I go and tell him now, he'll be suspicious. I must first let him look everywhere and when he doesn't succeed, he can't help feeling dejected. At that time, I'll go out and tell him where the flag is. Only then will he be able to show his gratitude towards me."

He crouched behind a tent to watch the motionless Zhou Botong only to see his body shoot upwards towards the top of the flag pole. He leapt several chi (1chi≈11in) high and used one hand to brace himself against the pole. Then he used his other hand to quickly pull himself up until he reached the top.

Zhao Zhijing was secretly astonished. Grand Martial Uncle Zhou must be almost a hundred years old. Even if he

practiced the Taoist doctrines, he still should not be able to avoid the slowing effects of old age. Yet, he is still as agile as a youth. So the stories in Wulin are really true.

Once up there, Zhou Botong scanned the whole camp, seeing several flags fluttering in the wind but none of them was the royal flag. He raised his head and shouted: "Jinlun Fawang, where is the royal flag?"

This angry yell was carried far and wide, its faint echoes bouncing off the cordillera to the West. Fawang had already reported the matter to Huo Bi Lie (Khubilai) so even though the whole army heard his shout, they remained silent.

Zhou Botong warned: "Fawang, if you still don't reply, I might have to scold you." There was still no response.

Zhou Botong scolded: "Jinlun Fawang, you rotten dog, you call yourself a hero? You're worse than a turtle that refuses to come out of its shell!"

From the East, someone suddenly called out: "Mischievous Old Urchin, if you want to steal the Prince's flag, it's right here."

Zhou Botong quickly rushed down the pole, shouting: "Where?" But after shouting, that person was silent. Zhou Botong searched countless tents but did not know where to start.

Farther away, the person shouted: "The royal flag is right here! The royal flag is right here!"

Zhou Botong dashed towards that sound but that person's voice was softer now, growing fainter and fainter. Zhou Botong only took a few steps, but the voice was already fading in and out like gossamer until finally it stopped. In reality, he did not know how far the voice was from camp.

Zhou Botong called out angrily: "Fawang, you rascal, are you playing hide-and-seek with me? Do you want me to burn down this whole camp so you'll come out?"

Zhao Zhijing thought, "If he sets the camp on fire, that can't be good. He hurried forward and said in a low voice: "Grand Martial Uncle Zhou, don't light a fire."

Grand Martial Uncle Zhou said: "Taoist priest, it's you! Why can't I light a fire?"

Zhao Zhijing quickly lied: "They intentionally want you to light a fire because the whole camp is filled with black powder. When you ignite it, the whole place could explode."

Zhou Botong was shocked. "It's a clever trick but also mean and cruel."

Zhao Zhijing was relieved to see that he believed him. He added: "I secretly inquired around and found out about this clever trick. I was afraid that you did not know about it so I had to tell you."

Grand Martial Uncle Zhou said: "Mmm, your intentions are good. If you hadn't told me, this Mischievous Old Urchin could have been killed."

Zhao Zhijing replied: "I also took a great risk by finding out where the royal flag is. Grand Martial Uncle Zhou, please come along with me."

But Zhou Botong suddenly said: "Don't tell me, don't tell me! If I can't find it, then I must admit defeat." The bet to find the flag was an amusing game. But if Zhao Zhijing gave him directions, he would feel bad even if he won because this kind of game required stealth.

Zhao Zhijing felt anxious. Then suddenly, he remembered, "He is known as the Mischievous Old Urchin, his mood is not

ordinary. I must tempt him first so he can get hooked." He said: "Grand Martial Uncle, I also want to steal the flag. Let's have a race to see who finds it first."

After saying that, he quickly rushed towards the hills. When he got there, he turned to find Zhou Botong following behind. He then darted to the third hill, pondering aloud: "They said that it's in a cave between two elm trees but where are these two elm trees?"

He rushed around the place but actually did not approach the cave where Fawang hidden the flag. Suddenly, he heard Zhou Botong exclaim; "I found it first!" He was standing between the two elm trees.

Zhao Zhijing smirked, thinking, "He stole the Prince's flag. He'll surely favor me now. What's more, I stopped him from setting the camp on fire. He thinks I saved his life. Everything is going exactly as Fawang planned. Satisfied, he started to step inside the cave. Suddenly, he heard a loud shout, the sound extremely sharp. Zhou Botong cried out: "Poisonous snake...Poisonous snake!"

Shocked, Zhao Zhijing quickly withdrew his foot that was already inside the cave. He asked: "Grand Martial Uncle! There's a poisonous snake inside the cave?"

Grand Martial Uncle Zhou replied: "It's not a snake... it's not a snake..." The voice was already getting weaker.

Zhao Zhijing anxiously gathered some twigs and lit them, using it as a torch so he could see inside the cave. He saw Zhou Botong on the ground, his left hand still clutching the flag. He was brandishing it as though trying to keep him away.

Zhao Zhijing asked: "Grand Martial Uncle, are you all right?"

Zhou Botong replied: "I have been poisoned...venom...venom...was bitten..." But before he could finish his statement, his hand had gradually grown limp.

Zhao Zhijing had seen him enter the cave but despite his high kung fu, he was still seriously injured. That was why he did not want to rush in without knowing what kind of fierce poison it was that afflicted him. What's more, the flag that Zhou Botong was clutching was not the same color as the king's flag. He thought, Fawang had connived with me to trick him into entering the cave but it was really his intention to harm him by poisoning him.

He was extremely vexed. He wanted to flee. So, without even bothering to see what it was that harmed Zhou Botong or what kind of poison it was, he just turned around and ran away.

The fire from the torch that he dropped on the way out was beginning to die out. Halfway out, he was stopped by someone who was holding out a hand to him. That person spoke softly: "Are you always this disrespectful to your seniors?"

The voice was distinctly stern but also as pure and as clear as jade. In the darkness, he saw the lithe form of a woman dressed in flowing white clothes. She was none other than Xiao Longnu. The light from the dying torch shone on her, revealing a beautiful face. Though delicate-looking, the face actually bore an angry expression. Zhao Zhijing was taken aback and rendered speechless. He was not expecting her and now that she was here, all he wanted was to run away. But, he could not even take a single step.

In truth, Xiao Longnu had been observing Zhao Zhijing from a distance, watching his every action. When he made Zhou Botong chase him towards the hills, Xiao Longnu followed as well. Zhou Botong knew this but did not pay attention to it.

Zhao Zhijing, on the other hand, was completely unaware. Xiao Longnu bent down and picked up the torch, using it to illuminate Zhou Botong's prostrate form. His face was shadowed and green-like in its pallor.

From her bosom, she casually took out her golden silk glove and slipped it on before lifting his arm to inspect him. She was shocked to see three spiders, their fangs firmly attached to Zhou Botong's finger. The spiders looked extremely strange. Their bodies had alternating red and green stripes that were so bright one could get mesmerized watching them. She knew that venomous animals were usually bright in color. The brighter their color the more lethal was their venom. These three spiders were still firmly biting onto Zhou Botong's finger. If she tried to capture them, they would evade her grasp. Finally, she raised her right hand and sent three "Jade Bee Needles" into the air, killing the three spiders immediately.

When sending the "Jade Bee Needles" towards them, she had used just the right amount of force to kill the spiders without injuring Zhou Botong.

This species of spider was called "Cai Xue Zhu" (Multicolored Snow Spider) and they only lived in the snowy mountains of Tibet. Their venom was one of the three most deadly poisons in the world. Jinlun Fawang had brought them with him from the West, intending to use them against famous poison experts in the Central Plains.

That time he tried to kill Guo Jing in Xiangyang, he had not thought of using the venomous Multicolored Snow Spiders. After he was hit by Li Mochou's Bing Po Zhen Zheng (Soul Freezing Silver Needle), he angrily returned to the encampment and took the spiders out of their golden case. He hoped that he would meet Li Mochou again and then have her feel their venom. Thus, it was just Zhou Botong's

misfortune to make the bet with him about stealing the flag. After making the deal with Zhao Zhijing, he placed the venomous spiders on the flag and hid it inside the cave.

Once the Snow-Colored Spiders saw flesh and blood, they would immediately leap on it and bite. They were attracted to blood and once someone was bitten, they could never escape. Their venom was so lethal that no one, not even Fawang, knew the antidote. He himself was not willing to keep the spiders too close to his body, afraid of getting bitten. Such a disaster he could ill-afford.

Xiao Longnu's Jade Bee Needles also came from highly venomous insects; the Jade Bees of Mount Zhongnan. Although the lethality of their venom was inferior to that of the Multicolored Snow Spider, the needles managed to enter their bodies, forcing them to produce anti-venom.

The venomous spiders were still biting into their prey when they were hit. Because they were still in the process of producing anti-venom and also sending out their own venom to their prey, they could not fight off the venom from the needles. However, right before they died, their bodily fluids spurted out of their mouths, sending the anti-venom into Zhou Botong's blood stream.

It was extremely fortunate that Xiao Longnu had rushed in to save him and saw the venomous spiders. Not daring to touch them, she instead launched three needles and luckily hit them, thus managing to discover the antidote to the world's most lethal venom.

Xiao Longnu watched the three Multicolored Snow Spider's lifeless forms on the ground, their bright red-green colors still managing to look fearsome. She also saw Zhou Botong lying motionless as though he was dead. In truth, she actually felt quite grateful to Zhou Botong. If not for him, Yang Guo would not have come to the Passionless Valley and she would have

been forced to marry Gongsun Zhi. His whole body was covered in a cold sweat and his breathing had grown irregular. Who would have thought he would die like this? In her heart, she was deeply moved. But all of a sudden, Zhou Botong's left hand began to move and she heard him say in a faint voice: "What was it that bit me with such...such fierceness?" He tried to get up but his body was too weak so that he fell back.

Xiao Longnu was overjoyed to find that he was not dead. She lifted the torch closer to his face and saw that the traces of the spider's venom were no longer there. Relieved, she asked: "You did not die?"

Zhou Botong chuckled: "Well, it doesn't look that way. I am right between half-death and half-life...ha-ha..." He wanted to laugh heartily but his hands and feet were still twitching and he was still unable to get up. His smile faded.

Laughter came from outside the cave. The sound was so strong that it resembled the ear-deafening sound of thunder rumbling. That person spoke: "Mischievous Old Urchin, have you stolen the royal flag? In today's wager, who won you or me?" The speaker was Jinlun Fawang.

Using her left hand, Xiao Longnu snuffed out the light. As long as she was wearing her gold silk glove, no sharp objects or raging fires could harm her. Zhou Botong replied: "Whether the Mischievous Old Man has lost in this game is not yet decided. But I'm afraid I've lost my life to you. Fawang, you rascal, what sort of poisonous spider is this, so evil and cruel?" When he spoke these words, his voice sounded soft and thin. Even though he was angry, he was far too weak. Still, his voice was as deep as Fawang's rumbling laughter.

Fawang was secretly amazed. He was bitten by my Cai Xue Zhu (Multicolored Snow Spider) but he didn't die. From his

voice, it is clear that his internal strength is profound, and is not below mine. Luckily, he fell for the trap, thus removing a powerful enemy. If he doesn't die soon, he'll only suffer for a short while.

Zhou Botong added: "Young Taoist Zhao Zhijing, you worked with this man to trick me. Go quickly to Qiu Chuji and ask him to kill you!"

Outside the cave, Zhao Zhijing hid behind Fawang, fearing for his life. He thought in terror, "How could I ask that of Martial Senior Qiu?"

Fawang laughingly said: "Taoist Priest Zhao is very good. Once I inform our prince of his great deed, he will refer him as an honorable teacher of the Quanzhen School." But, he thought; "If Zhou Botong dies, Taoist Priest Zhao won't have a way out. From this time on, he is under my control. His level of skill is ordinary. Zhou Botong acts like a crazy person, but Senior generations, like Qiu Chuji and so on, may honor him, but who would take his words seriously? How can the Quanzhen sect depend on the words of the Mischievous Old Urchin"?

Indignant, Zhou Botong let out a snort of contempt. Most of the venom in his body was gone but the Cai Xue Zhu was extremely venomous. Its effects wouldn't vanish that easily. Just as a tiny drop of it could kill several people, so could the slightest anger in Zhou Botong lead to a feeling of dizziness.

Xiao Longnu said: "Jinlun Fawang, you strike some, and then use this kind of venom to injure another. Is that a rule of your school? Quick, give us the antidote to cure Old Gentleman Zhou!"

Seeing Zhou Botong dazed, Fawang was relieved to find that the venom was working. He thought, "How could you depend on this little bit of a girl against me?"

He remembered what Zhao Zhijing said to him earlier in the day, that he was once defeated by her. Making up his mind to get her and show her exactly who was more powerful or stronger, he dashed into the cave, raising his left palm while his right hand moved as though to grab Xiao Longnu.

He said: "Here's the antidote. Take it." Xiao Longnu waved her right hand and a burst of soft tinkling could be heard. A golden bell attached to a silken belt flew out, heading towards his Qi Men Xue point.

Fawang thought, "If I still can't catch you today, how can I teach that Taoist priest Zhao not to laugh at me?" Swaying his body to avoid the golden bell, he reached into his vest to grasp two wheels, beating the two together to produce a loud sound that shook one's eardrums.

Maintaining her position, Xiao Longnu shifted slightly, aiming for his back where his Da Chui Xue point was. The change of moves was extremely fast; Fawang leapt back, exclaiming: "Your level of kung fu is rarely seen in women!"

The two of them fought inside the narrow passage and within the blink of an eye, they had already exchanged ten or so moves. When it came to power, Xiao Longnu was no match for Fawang, however, he was still worried about that day when he entered the cave in the hill and pricked his foot on a Bing Po Zhen Zheng (Soul Freezing Silver Needle), nearly costing him his life.

Although Xiao Longnu and Li Mochou came from the same school, Li Mochou was actually a level higher than her. Still, what he was worried about were the clever tricks that Li Mochou's master must have taught her as well. He was not only unwilling to get inside the cave and make the same mistake again, he also knew that there were poisonous spiders in there. One bite from them would mean sure death for him. So although he was anxious to capture her, he was

not bold enough to brave the danger. In the darkness, one could only hear the clang of metals as the lead and silver wheels met the golden bell; the sound almost resembling music made from small gongs.

Standing afar, Zhao Zhijing listened to the sounds of the two fighting while his heart beat wildly. Although it was not his intention to kill Zhou Botong, he knew that he could not escape the blame for his murder. In Wulin, no crime went unpunished. If Fawang killed Xiao Longnu, that would be good. But what if Xiao Longnu won? Even if she withdrew or ran away, the news would still spread. What should he do then? Grasping his sword, he started to pace, listening to the sound of the wheels and the golden bell grow louder as the sweat continued to stream from his body and soak his robes.

Even though Fawang's kung fu was higher than that of Xiao Longnu, his weapon was shorter than hers so he could not enter the cave. Eventually he found it difficult to gain the upper hand. After six or seven more moves, he still could not penetrate her defenses.

Xiao Longnu saw that Zhou Botong was once again motionless on the ground, close to death. Because she wanted to save him, she did not want the fight to last long. As the two of them fought in the darkness, her better vision gave her an advantage. She saw Fawang wield his wheel to the right before slanting and smashing down to create a crack. Immediately, she moved her silken belt to the right, aiming for him while at the same time, her left hand released ten Yu Feng Zhen (Jade Bee Needles), sending them shooting in his direction.

With very little distance between them, the Yu Feng (Jade Bee) needles shot out noiselessly so that Fawang did not realize it until they were only about a foot from his body. However, his wugong (martial arts) were no small matter and

in the face of danger, he hurriedly turned over his wheel to block the small golden bells of the coiling silken belt. Bracing himself with both feet he let out a loud shout at the same time. His body raised several zhang or so, allowing the ten or so Yu Feng needles to fly past the soles of his feet.

In his haste, he used a great amount of his force, raising both arms up as his body rose along with his silver and lead wheels, which were still successively blocking the small golden bells of the silken belt, sending them flying from his hands into midair. The wheels made a "wuwu" sound while the small golden bell let out a "ding-ding" noise as both shot straight up to about twenty feet from the ground.

Under the starlight, one could only see circles of gray and silver amidst the fiercely flying strip of belt above.

Xiao Longnu did not wait for him to fall back to the ground before she released another Yu Feng needle in his way. Fawang's body was still in midair and no matter how strong his wugong was, there was no way for him to deflect it. Although the distance between them this time was big, the circumstance was actually quite dire for him. However, when Fawang leapt he had anticipated that the enemy would certainly try to strike again so he immediately grabbed at his chest, using his external force to rip off two strips of cloth from his gown. As the gown tore into pieces, his laughter rang loud.

Just as the Yu Feng needles shot towards him, he waved the strips of cloth, allowing the tiny needles to pierce the cloth only. He gave another laugh as finally both his feet touched the ground, throwing away the strips of cloth as he did so. He then stretched out his hands to catch his two wheels as they fell from the air.

Twice, he was able to get away from danger, both made possible without using his wugong but his shrewd mind. At a

crucial moment, he escaped not only with his life but with Xiao Longnu's weapons as well. As soon as his feet touched the ground, he rushed up to the mouth of the cave and sneered: "Long Guniang (Miss Long), you still don't give up?"

He was afraid that Xiao Longnu might ambush him in the cave so he did not dare enter. However, Xiao Longnu did not know this so she hid herself near the entrance to the cave, silently clutching a single golden needle.

Fawang waited for a moment. Seeing nothing move, he formulated a plan. He held his two wheels in his right hand and used his left to pick up the two strips of cloth. He quickly tossed the wheels one after the other into the interior of the cave, using them to shield his feet from the poisoned needles on the ground while at the same time wielding the strips of cloth in the air, blocking his front. The two strips of cloth still bore the Yu Feng needles so they actually served as virulent weapons.

He laughed and said: "The wolf's fang cudgel! Long Guniang, why don't you test the severity of my wolf's fang?" But before he could even finish his sentence, he suddenly felt a tug in his hand. A half section of the cloth was unexpectedly grasped by Xiao Longnu! Ordinarily, she would not have so easily grabbed a wolf's fang cudgel with her bare hands but she was wearing her gold silk gloves, not even a wolf's fang could withstand it.

Taken by surprise, Fawang hurriedly applied strength to snatch it back but in between that space of an instant, Xiao Longnu already shot out the golden needles in her hand.

Fawang shouted in the dark, sensing the life-threatening situation. He then grabbed Zhou Botong's body which was lying on the ground and using his heel to raise him and use him as cover, following the stance of the "*Dao Cai Qi Xing Bu."

Afterwards, he hurriedly leapt out of the cave, glad to have escaped with his life. However, the life-and-death situation that he has just been through filled him with fear so that he only stopped when he was well away from the cave, gasping for breath.

Those twenty or so Yu Feng needles pierced Zhou Botong's body. Xiao Longnu gasped, thinking that he was dead. Also, his body was lying still, only serving to increase her guilt. But unexpectedly, Zhou Botong suddenly said: "Good pain, good pain! What in the world bit me?"

Although startled, Xiao Longnu was happy. She said: "Zhou Botong, you are not yet dead?" Knowing nothing about proper addresses, she spoke his name plainly.

Zhou Botong said: "Seems like I'm past death. Can it be that I'm alive again? I didn't know that once you're dead there is still enough life left."

Xiao Longnu replied: "You're not dead. That's good. That Fawang was frighteningly good. Not even once did I hit him." She then took out an iron stone (magnetic stone), using it to suck back the Yu Feng needles from his body.

Zhou Botong scolded: "Fawang, that thieving dog, he speaks nothing but lies, taking advantage of me because I'm dying, even using me to block the tiny needles..."

Xiao Longnu never stopped removing the needles and he also did not stop scolding that person. Xiao Longnu smiled faintly, saying: "Zhou Botong, those needles that pricked you are mine." At that moment, a sudden thought came to her, prompting her to ask: "My Yu Feng needles are steeped in bee venom, does your body feel bad?"

Zhou Botong replied: "I feel very comfortable. Prick me again."

Xiao Longnu thought that he was joking so she took out a tiny jade bottle from her chest, saying: "This bottle of Jade Bee honey is the antidote to my golden needles. If you drink it, then you'll be all right."

But Zhou Botong shook his head, saying repeatedly: "No, no! The pricks of your needles make me feel comfortable. It appears to counteract the venom of the spiders."

Xiao Longnu thought that Lao Wan Tong (Mischievous Old Urchin) was speaking nonsense again, but because he firmly refused to take it, she decided not to force him. Besides, it looked as though this strange old man's neigong (internal strength) was immeasurably deep; he was bitten by the venomous spiders and he did not die. Being hit by the Jade Bee needles was no hindrance.

In truth, the honeybees' sting, although extremely poisonous, could nevertheless treat various illnesses. The mysterious benefits of the Jade Bee included the cure for rheumatism and other such diseases that affected man. However, Xiao Longnu together with Zhou Botong were not familiar with medicine so they did not know that the Yu Feng needles could be used to combat poison with poison and the Cai Xue Zhu (Multicolored Snow Spider) poison was only one of many.

Fawang was listening to Zhou Botong's scolding words from outside the cave and was startled. He thought that this man scolding him must be an immortal god that could not be killed. If he really wanted to kill him, he must do so now while he was off his guard. Otherwise, the opportunity might not present itself again.

He advanced but before he could enter the cave's entrance, he paused. When he successively used both his silver and lead wheels to see if there was a trap waiting inside, he had also lost them and so now the only weapons he had in his

possession was Xiao Longnu's silken belt. He called out: "Long Guniang, I have your weapon with me!"

Then, with one shake, the silken belt unfolded and flew straight inside. His wugong had reached a level where he could wield any weapon without problem. So although Xiao Longnu's silken belt was weird, he thought he could use it like one would use a whip. But its ability was unexpected and not only that, he was able to use it even from where he was standing. He was not afraid anymore that the opponent would suddenly attack him with the golden needles.

With child-like innocence, Xiao Longnu rose to pick up the silver and lead wheels. She struck the two together and spoke: "Good, let's exchange weapons so we can start the fight." She stretched out her right arm but a quick pain she felt in her hand made her stop and refuse to push forward.

The lead wheel appeared small but it was actually made of very heavy metal. So when Xiao Longnu extended it, she was not prepared for its weight. She quickly pulled back and clutched the two wheels to her chest.

Fawang saw an advantage and quickly dashed forward, extending his hand to grab the wheels. Xiao Longnu took a step back as her left hand shot up as though to release the silver wheel. But it was only a feint move because she used this chance to release several Yu Feng needles in his direction.

These Jade Bee needles were the same ones she had extracted from Zhou Botong's body so they were no longer as poisonous. Still, they could be used as a weapon. Fawang was prepared, however. When he could not grab the silver wheel, he quickly leapt to the side, allowing the Yu Feng needles to shoot past him, hitting nothing but empty air.

Zhou Botong laughed, saying: "Great, let the bald thief come and then you hit him in the butt with your tiny needles!"

Xiao Longnu said: "Ai! I've used up all my Yu Feng needles!"

Dismayed, Zhou Botong scratched his head and said: "That's one annoying problem."

He had two personalities in him - one old, the other young - but he did not have the ability to balance the two, so whatever it was he thought or felt at the moment, he always said it without misgivings.

Jinlun Fawang had a scheming mind, but he was really unaware of Zhou Botong's or Xiao Longnu's personalities. Believing that no one under the heavens could outsmart him, he thought: "You said that you've used up all your Yu Feng needles. Why should I believe you? It's clear that you want me to believe that to entice me to lower my guard. That old ploy is not going to work on me." Thus, Xiao Longnu's frank speech instead caused Fawang to be even less daring, especially when only days ago in the cave in the hills, Yang Guo had tricked him. He did not want to suffer the same fate as Nimoxing and be crippled in both legs. He would rather wait twelve long hours than go through that.

One hour soon turned to two hours until finally the sky showed first light. Zhou Botong sat in a kneeling position, trying to circulate his chi in order to get rid of the poison still in his body. But the venom of the Cai Xue spiders was very strong. As he tried to move his chi, his chest suddenly tightened and he felt nauseous. There was no spot where he did not experience some problem. He had tried circulating his chi through different paths, but each try had the same result.

Finally, he sighed dejectedly and said: "Ai, Lao Wan Tong! You've tried it so many times its no longer amusing!"

Fawang was peeping in from outside, but since he did not wait and stay in his place for long, he did not know of the problem. He thought to himself: "This is not good. The old man is trying to practice nei gong!"

With this new development, he carefully took out a golden box from his bosom, removing the cover to reveal several crawling Cai Xue spiders inside. When exposed to the sun, the light made their variegated red and green colors brighter and even more eye-catching.

Next, Fawang took out a pair of rhinoceros horns and used them to catch the spiders between them and gently lifted them from the sticky web. Gently, he tossed the Cai Xue spiders towards the mouth of the cave where they stuck. He repeated his movements and threw the rest of the venomous spiders from the small box towards the cave. Their sticky web soon covered the entire cave's entrance. The spiders had been inside the small box for a very long time and they had not been fed so as soon as they were able to get out, they immediately set to work, climbing up, moving east, dropping low, and approaching west, hanging suspended, until they were able to create a network of webs in just a very short time.

Xiao Longnu and Zhou Botong watched with interest as the spiders spun the web, yet it never occurred to either one of them to stop their progress. Only when the web reached about ten feet in diameter, covering the entire mouth of the cave, and the red-green venomous spiders start to crawl around did they look troubled. Xiao Longnu said softly: "What a pity I don't have any more Yu Feng needles left. I could have used one to remove these nasty spiders."

Zhou Botong picked up a dried branch, intending to use it to remove the spider web when suddenly a huge butterfly came flitting near the mouth of the cave and ended up caught in

the spider web. The species originated from the Kunlun Mountains so when it struck the web, it had enough power in its body to attempt to struggle and escape. However, although the butterfly's body was huge, one touch of the spider silk and it went straight into paralysis.

Xiao Longnu realized this and quickly said: "Don't! The web is poisonous!" Alarmed, Zhou Botong leapt away and hastily flung the stick to the ground.

Indeed, when Fawang released the venomous spiders, he not only intended to use it to seal the cave, but he also hoped that they would use their hands to destroy it. One touch would cause the poison to seep into the skin and enter the body.

Sitting cross-legged again, Zhou Botong watched as the spiders crowded around the butterfly and started to eat it. He thought: "My internal flow is still unstable. It will be some time before I recover."

Xiao Longnu, on the other hand, was thinking: If he is going to remain inactive, how will Lao Wan Tong be able to move the poison up his body in order to remove it completely? So she asked: "How many days and nights will it take for you to recover your internal energy?"

Zhou Botong sighed and said: "I need one hundred days and one hundred evenings before I can manage it."

Xiao Longnu was surprised to hear this so she asked: "How are we going to survive?"

Zhou Botong chuckled, saying: "Even if that bald thief gives us food to eat, being trapped in this cave for several years is not fun."

Xiao Longnu replied: "He'll never give us food." She let out a sigh. "If it were Guo'Er with me in this cave, I wouldn't mind

spending a lifetime here."

"What makes you place Yang Guo above me?" Zhou Botong said indignantly. "Is he also stronger than me? You don't think I'm good company?"

Although his words made no sense, Xiao Longnu did not mind it. She only showed a cold smile and said: "Yang Guo knows the Quanzhen swordplay. Together, we can easily defeat this Buddhist priest and send him running away into the wilderness."

Zhou Botong snorted: "Humph, the Quanzhen swordplay is not that difficult to understand. Even I can use it. Will Yang Guo be able to beat me?"

"When we combine our swords together in a technique called *Yunu Suxin swordplay ['Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden'], it is important that his heart is filled with love for me and my heart is filled with love for him so we become united and are able to subdue the enemy."

When Zhou Botong heard her speak about the love between a man and a woman, he was filled with apprehension. He immediately waved his hand and said again and again: "Stop, stop - I don't love you! You also can't possibly love me. But I'm telling you it's much better that there's two of us in this cave. Years ago I was trapped in a cave in Tao Hua Island and had no one to accompany me. I was forced to fight with myself the whole time. But this time, it's entirely different because I have you. It's going to be fun!" With such happy thought, he could imagine being in that cave for a long time.

Xiao Longnu asked dubiously: "Fight with oneself? Is there such a method?" Pleased, Zhou Botong immediately launched into a discussion of the "Fen Xin Er Yong Zuo You Hu" [Mutual Hands Combat] method.

Xiao Longnu thought to herself: "If I could learn this method, then I could use the Quanzhen sword play with my left hand and the Yunu sword play with my right. With the two combined, I will be able to complete the Yunu Suxin sword play. But I'm afraid that I won't be able to learn this kung fu in just one evening. "This kung fu is difficult to learn," she told him.

Zhou Botong replied: "If you say it's difficult, then it will really be difficult. If you say it's easy, then it will be easy. There are people who spend their entire lifetime learning yet never understand a thing; while there are people who only need a few days to understand it. You've heard about those two kids, Guo Jing and Huang Rong, right?" Xiao Longnu nodded.

Zhou Botong continued: "Who do you think is more intelligent?"

Xiao Longnu answered: "Madame Guo is a thousand times cleverer. Guo'er told me once that there is no one in this generation who could surpass her intelligence and wisdom. Great Hero Guo is virtuous, but his level is actually ordinary."

Zhou Botong laughed. "What do you mean "ordinary"? Are you saying he's stupid? Tell me; am I intelligent, or stupid?"

Xiao Longnu smiled and said: "I look at you and although you're not young, you act silly. Sometimes, you say weird things and you act a little mad."

Zhou Botong clapped his hands, saying: "Ah, you're right. I once taught this Zuo You Hu method to Brother Guo Jing and it only took him a few days to learn it. Afterwards, he tried to teach the same lesson to his wife. You said that this child, Huang Rong is sharp and clever with a mind higher than that of a seventy-eight year old man, but she could not understand this kung fu. I thought that the little idiot Guo

Jing probably did not teach her properly, so Lao Wan Tong decided to come and teach her himself. I repeated the left hand and right strokes with her, but she still didn't understand how to combine the two together. It was then that I realized that some men may learn a method that other men would spend a lifetime learning, yet never understand. You see, intelligence is not the only measure of success."

Xiao Longnu said: "Don't tell me that when stupid people learn this kung fu, they can surpass even the smart ones. I can't believe it."

Zhou Botong grinned and said: "I look at you and see that your intelligence is more or less equal to that of young Huang Rong. Your wugong is not that far from hers either. Since you don't believe, why not try to draw a square on the ground with your left index finger and a circle with your right at the same time?"

Xiao Longnu followed his instructions and extended both her index fingers to the ground, making downward strokes to create the figures. However, it turned out that the square looked like a circle and the circle looked like a square.

Zhou Botong laughingly said: "See? I told you it's not easy."

Smiling faintly, Xiao Longnu emptied her mind before extending her index fingers again. This time, she was able to draw a perfect square and a perfect circle.

In his astonishment, Zhou Botong could only stammer: "You...you...you..." A moment passed before he could speak: "You studied this before?"

"Ah, I haven't," Xiao Longnu replied. "Besides, didn't you say this is difficult?"

Zhou Botong scratched the white hairs on his head and asked: "Then how did you know how to draw?"

Xiao Longnu said: "I don't know. I didn't think. I just held out my fingers and drew the figures."

As she said this, she wrote the three characters "lao wan tong" with her left hand and the three characters "xiao long nu" with her right. The two hand strokes were so neatly written they looked like the ones found in books and the handwriting was also very elegant.

Delighted, Zhou Botong declared: "This shows that you learned this method even when you were still in your mother's womb! This is so much better!"

Thereupon, he taught her how to attack with her left and defend with her right, strike with her right and block with her left. It was in Tao Hua Island that he first learned this strange kung fu that was unmatched under the heavens so when the old man spoke, she listened.

In truth, the essence of the Zuo You Hu technique was the four characters "Fin Xin Er Yong." Often, people with high intelligence have complicated thoughts and they always rushed from one thought to another. *During the Three Kingdoms period, Cao Zi wrote the Qi Bu Shi, which depicted the turbulence of Wu Dynasty. The poem could be likened to that of a person trying to learn the Zuo You Hu kung fu technique, only to have the turbulence that makes it impossible to learn occur inside the person's mind.

Xiao Longnu's kung fu was based on suppressing all emotions and desires. Even when she was only eight or nine years old she mastered her feelings, stopping them like one would water. After she fell madly in love with Yang Guo, however, the constant pain in her heart from thinking of him caused her kung fu to gradually decline. But now, this weird technique was introduced, unexpectedly helping her to recover.

After she resumed practicing the Gumu Pai nei gong, she was actually at the same level as Lin Chaoying when she was pining over her lost love. Their mind sets were the same for the most part so they had more or less the same capacity for understanding. As soon as Zhou Botong moved his finger, she understood his meaning quickly. But it was only because Zhou Botong, Guo Jing, and Xiao Longnu shared the same personality, innocence of heart, and that was why people like Huang Rong, Yang Guo, and Zhu Ziliu could not learn it.

Zhou Botong had yet to remove the poison from his body, but he continued to speak and draw with enthusiasm. Xiao Longnu, on the other hand, kept on nodding her head, but in her mind she was secretly trying to figure out how to use the Yunu sword play with her right hand and the Quanzhen sword play with her left. And so after several hours of playing this Chinese finger game with him, she finally grasped the idea.

"I understand completely," she spoke. To test it out, she moved her hands, making circular and thrusting motions with it.

Zhou Botong's jaw dropped. He could only shout: "Strange! Strange!"

Guarding the cave outside, Fawang and Zhao Zhijing heard the two of them muttering and laughing with each other so they pressed closer but they could only hear snatches of their conversation, not enough to make the meaning clear.

Xiao Longnu raised her head at that moment and saw them eavesdropping. She straightened and said, "We're getting out of here!"

Zhou Botong looked at her blankly, asking: "How exactly?"

"If we go out and catch that bald thief, we can force him to give you the antidote," Xiao Longnu replied.

Zhou Botong stroked his beard, saying, "You think you can beat him?"

As they spoke, they suddenly heard a buzzing sound. A honeybee got stuck to the spider web and tried to struggle. Earlier when the big butterfly touched the spider's silk, it immediately went into paralysis. This honeybee was small in size, but it seemed unaffected by the poison of the Cai Xue Spiders and even succeeded in splitting the web open.

The venomous spiders zealously eyed it from the side, but dared not go forward and tangle it within their silk. After a long while, the honeybee would weaken and only then would the venomous spiders attack it.

In the Ancient Tomb, Xiao Longnu kept swarms of Jade Bees as pets; being together with honeybees all year long there was no doubt her technique of controlling bees was very good. Moreover, she regarded all bees as friends. When this honeybee was in trouble, she could not stand it. Suddenly changing her mind, she said: "Although these venomous spiders are evil-looking, my bees won't necessarily be afraid of them."

She then took out the jade bottle from her bosom, opened the lid, and used her right hand to fan the air around it, allowing the fragrant aroma to spread and penetrate through the thick spider web.

Surprised, Zhou Botong asked: "What are you doing?"

"Do you want to see an amusing trick?" Xiao Longnu asked.

Zhou Botong was delighted, saying: "Wonderful!" Then, asked: "What trick is that?"

Xiao Longnu only smiled, not responding as she continued moving her palm.

This was the season when the wild flowers in the valley were in full bloom. Wherever the sweet scent of honey could be smelled, the numerous wild bees gathering honey rushed in that direction. When the wild bees rushed to the cave, they got tangled in the spider web, and immediately began to struggle. Some died after being bitten by the venomous spiders while others were able to sting a few spiders. Although the Cai Xue Spiders were considered among the world's most poisonous, too much bee venom in their bodies caused them to become stiff and gradually die.

Zhou Botong was ecstatic as he looked on, while outside the cave, Jinlun Fawang and Zhao Zhijing watched in helpless astonishment.

In the meantime, the Cai Xue Spiders still had the upper hand. Only three poisonous spiders were dead while about forty or so honeybees were killed. However, the wild bees continued to swarm. At first, there were only thirty of them, but fifty more came and got caught in the web. Afterwards, dozens more of them came, numbering up to a hundred so that the spider web covering the mouth of the cave soon began to fill up, and they were stinging the venomous spiders until they died.

Zhao Zhijing had experienced firsthand the honeybee's sting. Seeing them now, with his own eyes, he realized the circumstance were grave. Hastily, he dived into the bushes to avoid them.

Fawang, on the other hand, knew that the Cai Xue Spiders were rare. If they are annihilated, there would be none left who could do their job. Therefore, he and the venomous spiders shared a common hatred of this swarm of wild bees. However, he did not know that it was Xiao Longnu who

summoned them. All he thought about was how to force Zhou Botong and Xiao Longnu out of the cave and take their lives.

Young Xiao Longnu dipped a finger into the jade bottle and shot some honey towards Fawang, hitting him on both sides. He howled into the cave's entrance as several wild bees made an about-face and headed towards him.

Fawang was panic-stricken as he realized the dire situation he was in. He dashed forward quickly. Although the wild bees were fast, his lightness kungfu was faster so within moments, he was already ten or so feet away from them. His figure appeared like a wisp of black smoke, rushing further and further away. Failing to catch up, the wild bees merely scattered around.

Xiao Longnu stamped her foot again and again, saying repeatedly: "What a pity! What a pity!"

Zhou Botong asked: "What pity?"

"He ran away before I could snatch the antidote from him," Xiao Longnu replied.

Indeed, she planned to summon the honeybees so they could cover Fawang's flank, effectively trapping him within a sphere. However, these wild bees came from different nests and therefore came from different directions. Unlike the tamed Jade Bees of the Ancient Tomb, when she wanted them to pursue, sting the enemy, return, outflank him, or make a circle like in a battle formation, the wild bees were hopeless.

Zhou Botong, however, was full of admiration. He was the sort who liked games and when he played, his spirit usually improved. So when he clapped his hands with enthusiasm, he forgot all about the poison still in his body.

Xiao Longnu saw that due to the weight of the dead and dying bees the spider web had fallen; she leaped out and shouted, "Come!"

Zhou Botong followed, but he fell down as he was about to leap. "I ... I can't exert my strength!" he said. Suddenly his body shivered and his teeth chattered, like he was plunged into an ocean of ice. His lips turned white and his face turned blue, while his beard could not stop swaying.

Xiao Longnu was startled. "Zhou Botong! What happened?"

"Prick...prick me ... with your needle again," he said unevenly.

Xiao Lung Nu was surprised, "My needles are poisonous."

"Then ... the poison ... is good," the old man responded weakly.

Xiao Longnu remembered the battle between the spiders and wild bees; she thought, "Could it be that the bee's venom is the antidote to the spiders'?" She quickly picked several needles from the ground and pricked them into his arm. "Good! More! More!" Zhou Botong called out.

Xiao Longnu pricked him some more while keeping her eyes on him. She saw the effect of the spider's poison had faded from his face. After more than ten pricks, Zhou Botong stopped shivering. He sighed and said, "It is truly a poison against poison." He tried to exert his energy but it turned out the poison had not been completely neutralized.

Suddenly he slapped his knee and said, "Miss Long, your bee poison is not strong enough and they are no longer fresh."

"That case I am going to call some bees to sting you," she said with a smile.

“Thank you, thank you ...” the old man said, “Hurry up!”

Xiao Longnu then opened the jade bottle to lure a crowd of wild bees. Zhou Botong was grinning from ear to ear; he took off his clothes and let the bees sting him while he exerted his internal energy. First he sucked the bees’ venom to his [dan tian – pubic area, lower stomach] and then spread it out toward all his veins. In approximately the time needed to eat a bowl of rice the spider venom had been completely neutralized. The bee sting started to hurt him. “Enough! Enough!” he cried, putting on his clothes back, “More bee stings and I am dead.” Xiao Longnu smiled and drove the bees away.

She picked her [jin ling ruan so] white silk belt with golden bells from the ground and asked, “I am going to Mount Zhongnan. Are you coming?”

Zhou Botong shook his head, “I have an important matter to deal with. You go ahead.”

“Ah! I almost forget,” said Xiao Longnu. “You are going to Xiangyang to give Hero Guo a hand.” As soon as the word ‘Guo Da Xia’ came out of her mouth, Guo Fu came into her mind. From Guo Fu, she remembered Yang Guo. “Zhou Botong, if you see Yang Guo, please don’t let him know you have seen me,” she sadly said.

Zhou Botong mumbled some incoherent words, like he was thinking really hard. A moment later he looked up and asked, “What did you say?”

“Never mind,” she answered. “Farewell then.”

Zhou Botong was preoccupied; he simply nodded and waved his hand. Xiao Longnu turned around and started walking; but before reaching the plain she heard strange noises from Zhou Botong, similar to her own commands to the bees. She

thought it was peculiar and quietly walked back. Hiding behind a tree she saw Zhou Botong – with one hand holding a jade bottle, flailing his hand around and howling noisily. She groped into her pocket and sure enough, her jade honey bottle was gone. The funny thing was, after calling for a while only a handful of wild bees were flying around his jade bottle.

Xiao Longnu could not help chuckling. Coming out from behind the tree she called, “Zhou Botong! Let me teach you!”

Zhou Botong blushed, he was caught red handed with the jade bottle in his hand. He kicked the ground and leaped several meters and quickly ran downhill.

Xiao Longnu laughed heartily. This old man was really strange and interesting. But as the echo of her laughter was fading away, she began to feel lonely and miserable; and her tears flowed without inhibition. She had fought Jinlun Fawang, both with her strength and wisdom and then had the Old Urchin’s company for the rest of the night. Now that the friend and foe were gone, she felt utter loneliness, like an orphan without anybody to care.

In another moment she remembered Zhao Zhijing and Yin Zhiping. Even if she cut their bodies into ten thousand pieces, would her hatred be alleviated? She could easily kill those two, but she thought what good would that be? She stood and stared blankly under a big elm tree for a half a day; then said to herself, “Let me find them first.”

She went down the hill and found her donkey grazing in the foothills. When she arrived at the road fork going to the Mongolian camp, she saw dust flying, flags fluttering, and heard the sound of hoofs moving south toward Xiangyang. Xiao Longnu hesitated, “How could I find those two priests amongst this mighty force?”

Suddenly she saw three horses and riders in the distance. They wore the yellow robe and Taoist hat. "Why three?" she wondered. She strained her eyes and could see Yin Zhiping rode in the back, with Zhao Zhijing and an unknown young Taoist priest in front of him. Xiao Longnu pulled her reins and followed with her donkey. Yin Zhiping heard the donkey and turned his head. His countenance paled.

"Martial Brother Zhao, who is that woman?" the young priest asked.

"Our archenemy," he answered, "Don't ask too much."

The young priest was startled. "The Scarlet Serpent Deity Li Mochou?" he asked, trembling with fear.

"No, but she is her martial sister," Zhijing explained.

The young priest was Qi Zhicheng, one of Qiu Chuji's disciples. He knew Li Mochou had fought with the Quanzhen's masters, and they were troubled by her. Naturally her martial sister would not be friendly toward the Quanzhen sect.

Zhao Zhijing anxiously whipped his horse and galloped away. Both Yin and Qi did not have any choice but to follow suit, leaving Xiao Longnu far behind. But the donkey had good stamina; it could not run fast, but it ran steadily. After about four or five li the horses panted and slowed down, and Xiao Longnu gradually caught up with them. Again Zhijing lifted his whip and struck his horse, but the horses' strength was already spent; they ran for while, and then slowly trotted.

"Martial Brother Zhao," Qi Zhicheng said, "Let us block the enemy to give Martial Brother Yin a chance to escape."

Zhao Zhijing's face turned green with anger. "You talk rubbish!" he snapped. "Aren't you afraid of death?"

“Martial Brother Yin bears the heavy burden of becoming our new Sect Leader [zhang jiao],” answered Qi Zhicheng. “We have the responsibility to protect him.” He was sent by Qiu Chuji to summon Yin Zhiping back to Chongyang Palace to be the new Sect Leader.

Zhijing snorted and ignored him. He thought, “You don’t know the height of the heaven, or the depth of the earth; yet you want to block her with your meager skill?”

Qi Zhicheng saw his angry face and did not dare to say anything. He held his reins to wait for Yin Zhiping; then he spoke to him in a low voice, “Martial Brother Yin, you bear a very heavy responsibility, you’d better go first.” Zhibing simply shook his head. “No need,” he said, “She can do anything she wants.”

Qi Zhicheng saw his calmness and could not help but admire him. “No wonder Master wants him to take over,” he thought. “Merely by his calmness, who among the third generation disciples can match him?” Actually, he did not know that Yin Zhiping at this time had no regard for his own safety. If Xiao Longnu wanted to kill him, he would stretch out his neck voluntarily. Zhao Zhijing saw those two were calm, but he was always thinking of ways of escaping. It was good that Xiao Longnu did not seem to plan to attack soon. Even so, he could not help but turn his head in anxiety every now and then.

The four of them proceeded north. By now they were already far away from the Mongolian troops. The wind still carried a muffled sound of horse hoofs and a faint sound of a military bugle, but the area they were traveling in was desolate. The houses were in ruin and the common people had left to avoid the enemy troops. Before that day Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing could still find a place to eat. But now, not even a house was left standing.

That evening the three of them spent the night in a house ruin without any windows or doors. Zhao Zhijing took a look outside, and saw Xiao Longnu sleeping on a piece of rope strung between two big trees. Qi Zhicheng also saw this amazing skill and was scared. Zhijing did not dare to close his eyes. He was ready to jump and dash out whenever any noise came from the trees. Yin Zhiping was the only one who slept soundly all through the night.

Early the next morning they continued their journey. Zhao Zhijing was tired; he rode his horse in silence. Qi Zhicheng and Yin Zhiping rode together, about two to three meters behind. Qi Zhicheng could not contain himself much longer and said, "Martial Brother Yin, I have seen both you and Martial Brother Zhao's martial art skills. Each of you has his own strengths and weaknesses, it really is difficult to compare. But speaking of character, there is no comparison between yours and his."

Yin Zhiping smiled wryly. He asked, "How long will Master and Martial Uncles live in seclusion?"

"Master said at least three months, but it could be as long as a year," Qi Zhicheng answered. "That was the reason he anxiously summoned Martial Brother Yin to take over."

Yin Zhiping was lost in thought. "Their skills are already very high, what kind of martial arts are they developing?" he thought aloud.

Qi Zhicheng answered in low voice, "I heard the five Masters want to develop something to defeat the Ancient Tomb Sect."

Yin Zhiping said, "Oh" and could not help but cast a glance toward Xiao Longnu.

In the year when Xiao Longnu turned 18, a large group of heretic martial artists gathered at Mount Zhongnan. Da'erba and Huo Du easily entered the Chongyang Temple and Huo Du was able to wound Hao Datong in a few stances. If Guo Jing had not arrived on time, Quanzhen School would have suffered a heavy blow. Nonetheless, the main hall of the Chongyang shrine was burned by Huo Du and his men. Since the time Master Chongyang's grandeur awed the realm, Quanzhen was known as the orthodox martial arts school. The Seven Masters of Quanzhen had deep and profound martial arts cultivation and retained Quanzhen's reputation. However, the martial arts of the Tibetan Lamaistic Sect proved to be powerful too and when Jinlun Fawang first came to China he shocked the realm with his impressive skills. On their return Hao Datong and Sun Bu'Er expressed their worries and added more frustration for Qiu Chuji and others. At the Heroes' Assembly at Dasheng Guan, Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo were able to repel Jinlun Fawang and his pupils. Hao Datong, Sun Bu'Er, Zhao Zhijing and Yin Zhiping saw the martial arts that were displayed by Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were excellent. Yang Guo was able to mock and overcome Zhao Zhijing without making actual movements in Guo Jing's study. Later on, Xiao Longnu heavily injured Zhao Zhijing within one stance. Although Sun Bu'Er was present, she could not clearly see the movements Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu made. It seemed the martial arts of the Quanzhen School were entirely useless when facing the Ancient Tomb School; this was another frightening thought. Afterwards, they heard that Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo defeated Jinlun Fawang with their combined swordplay; the entire Quanzhen School was shocked.

Only five of the Seven Masters of Quanzhen were still alive at this time, Tan Chuduan died a long time ago. Ma Yu had also passed away by now. Liu Chuxuan assumed leadership of Quanzhen for a short while before passing the leadership

onto Qiu Chuji. The five masters were old and their vigour was declining. There were no exceptional talents amongst the third and fourth generation. With the Mongolians trying to invade the south, the country was in peril. The Five Masters of Quanzhen would be able to deal with Jinlun Fawang should he lead his disciples against Quanzhen or the Ancient Tomb Sect should they try to extract vengeance upon Quanzhen. However, if they waited another ten years or so, by that time both internal and external calamity would hit the Quanzhen School. At that point the Quanzhen School would face definite defeat. That is why the Five Masters agreed to contemplate and create a new martial arts skill to protect the reputation of Quanzhen. This skill would not only protect the Quanzhen prestige but also protect the country and save the people. That is why they could be bothered by other duties, and that is why they summoned Yin Zhiping back to become acting leader of the Quanzhen School.

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Yin Zhiping and the others were heading northwest. Xiao Longnu followed them not too far behind. That day they entered Shanxi province. "Martial Brother Yin," said Zhicheng. "We are getting close to Chongyang Palace. Do you think this Miss Long would dare to pursue us?"

Yin Zhiping only mumbled, "Hmmm." He had no idea what her intentions were. He had pondered this in his heart for a while now. "Would she expose my evil conduct to the Quanzhen Five Masters? Will she attack mercilessly? Perhaps she was only going to the Ancient Tomb and took the same way. Also ... also ... she had shown mercy to me before, would she forgive me?" He couldn't help blushing, secretly ashamed at his foolish delusion. He had always regarded her as a deity. How could a mortal be compared to an immortal? Though he already showed disregard for his own life or

death, honor or disgrace; in reality his heart was filled with fear.

Several days later they arrived at the base of Mount Zhongnan. Qi Zhicheng took out a whistling arrow; and with his arm strength flung it into the sky. It shot up and made a loud whistling noise. Not too long after four priests wearing yellow Taoist hats descended the mountain. Bowing to Yin Zhiping in respect one of them said, "Reverend Chonghe, you're back. We have been waiting for a long time."

'Chonghe' was Yin Zhiping's religious title; but apart from his own disciples, nobody had called him by that title before. These four Taoist were the third generation disciples from various Masters; they were the same level as he was and one of them was even older than him. These four suddenly changed their way of addressing him, Yin Zhiping felt uncomfortable. He quickly dismounted his horse and reciprocate their bow and said modestly, "Four Martial Brothers are my seniors, your Younger Martial Brother is not worthy of such a title."

The oldest priest was Ma Yu's disciple. He said, "The five Martial Uncles have issued a decree that as soon as Reverend Chonghe arrives, he has to take the Interim Sect Leader position. The official inauguration will have to wait until the Fourth Uncle [that is, Qiu Chuji] finishes his meditation."

"How long have Master and four Martial Uncles been in seclusion?" Yin Zhiping asked.

"It has been 20 days," came the answer.

While they were still talking, there came a sweet sound of music from the mountain. Sixteen Taoist priests came near playing either the sheng or qing and arranged themselves on either side of the road. Another set of sixteen Taoist priests came. They carried in their hands some wooden musical

instruments, swords, earthen bowls, and other religious articles. They bowed toward Yin Zhiping and surrounded him, acting as human shields, and together they walked back up the mountain, unwittingly leaving Zhao Zhijing behind without paying any respect to him. He was angry and envious at the same time. "Just wait till the Sect Leader position falls into my hands, I want to see your face then," he said in his heart.

They arrived at the Chongyang Palace at dusk. There were more than five hundred Taoists arranged in the main hall all the way to the entrance outside the palace. Drums, cymbals and bells were struck simultaneously. The several hundreds Taoists austere bowed to welcome their Sect Leader.

Seeing this grand scene Yin Zhiping's spirits soared. Escorted by the sixteen most senior disciples he entered the Hall of the Three Pure Ones, he walked forward to respectfully kowtowed to the statues of the Taoist Three Pure Ones, Heavenly Deity Worthy of the Primordial Beginning, Heavenly Lord Worthy of the Numinous Treasure and Exalted Supreme Lord Lao. Then, they progressed to the rear hall to pay respects to the painting of Wang Chongyang, the founding grand master of the Quanzhen Sect. Yin Zhiping respectfully kowtowed to the painting. Then, he entered the third hall, this was the hall where the Seven Masters gathered to deliberate. Yin Zhiping kowtowed to the seven empty chairs that were in the hall. After that they returned to the main hall, the Hall of the Three Pure Ones.

Qiu Chuji's second disciple Li Zhichang took out the Sect Leader decree and read it out loud while Yin Zhiping knelt down, listening attentively. The decree assigned Yin Zhiping to take over the Interim Sect Leader position. Yin Zhiping was proud to accept this lofty position; but he was touched and ashamed at the same time. He stole a glance toward Zhao

Zhijing who stood to one side. Zhao had a smirk in his face, Yin Zhiping shuddered.

As soon as the decree was read Yin Zhiping stood up to express his humble acceptance. But before he could say anything, a priest suddenly barged in, loudly saying, "Reporting to the Reverend Sect Leader, you have a guest waiting outside!"

Yin Zhiping was startled; he did not expect Xiao Longnu would dare to confront him during that important ceremony. He did not know how to deal with it, and thought that since he could not run away, he might as well brace himself and face her. He simply said, "Please bring the guest in."

The priest bowed and turned around; and came back with two people. Not only Yin Zhiping, but the others were surprised as well. The guests were a Mongolian officer and another man he had met at Khubilai's camp in Hunan. The Mongolian high-level official spoke with a clear voice, "His Majesty the Emperor has made a decision to grant an Imperial Decree to the Sect Leader of the Quanzhen Sect." He walked toward the center of the main hall as he was speaking. Stopping at the center he produced a yellow satin scroll; unrolling the scroll with both hands he read out, "Imperial decree conferred to the Sect Leader of the Quanzhen Sect the special position to act as: shen sian yan dao da zong zhi. [lit. The deity/divine person to develop an excellent model of learning and integrity] He is to be the religious leader of the 'Great Way' [dao of Taoism] and to reveal the mystery of respectable and perfect mankind. To be in charge of various sects of Taoism ..."

Reading to this point he saw nobody kneeling down; he was annoyed and said, "Sect Leader, please kneel to accept the imperial decree."

Yin Zhiping moved forward and bowed in respect. "My Master Sect Leader Qiu Chuji is currently meditating in a closed room. I am the Interim Sect Leader. The Imperial Decree is not bestowed on me; how would I dare to accept it?" he said.

The Mongolian officer smiled and said, "His Majesty the Emperor has said that the Venerable Reverend Qiu – who was well respected by our Great Genghis Khan is old; His Majesty was not sure if he is still in this world. Therefore, His Majesty has bestowed this decree not to the Venerable Reverend Qiu but to the Sect Leader of the Quanzhen Sect. Whoever the Sect Leader is, he is worthy to accept this."

"This lowly priest does not have competency; how would he dare to accept?" Yin Zhiping insisted on refusing the decree.

The officer laughed and said, "Don't be bashful; quickly accept this order."

Yin reluctantly said, "This decree is unexpected, I can't accept it just like that. I respectfully ask Your Honor to take a rest and have some tea while I discuss this matter with my martial brothers."

The officer was not happy, but he could not do anything. He tucked the imperial decree away and said, "Very well. But I really do not know what you have to discuss."

Four priests on duty ushered the guests to the guest chamber and served tea.

In the meantime Yin Zhiping invited sixteen third generation disciples to convene in another room in the courtyard. "This is not a small matter, this junior does not dare to act without Martial Brothers' approval," he said, "I will respectfully listen to your valuable suggestions."

"The Mongolian Emperor has shown us kindness, it is just proper for us to gracefully accept it," Zhao Zhijing said.

“Obviously our Sect is getting more prosperous than ever so that the Mongolian Emperor does not dare to look down upon us.” He was speaking with self-satisfaction in his voice and could not hold in his happy laugh.

“No, I don’t agree!” Li Zhichang shook his head. “Mongolia invaded our country and cruelly massacred our people. How can we accept this decree?”

“Uncle Master Qiu himself had accepted Genghis Khan’s royal invitation and traveled thousands of miles to the west,” Zhao Zhijing countered. “Sect Leader Yin and you, Martial Brother Li, were among those who accompanied him on the journey. Having this precedent, why do we refuse the imperial decree now?”

“It’s different,” Li Zhichang said. “At that time Mongolia was at war with the Jin dynasty and had not invaded our country. They even formed an alliance with our great Song dynasty. How can you compare our present situation to those times?”

“You have a very dangerous opinion,” Zhao Zhijing threatened. “Mount Zhongnan is under Mongolian rule; our Chongyang Palace is within Mongolian territory. If we refuse the decree, wouldn’t that mean we are inviting a great disaster?”

Li Zhichang was offended. “Martial Brother Zhao’s opinion is not right,” he said.

“What do you mean ‘not right?’” Zhao Zhijing said harshly, “Would Martial Brother Li give us direction?”

“Give you direction, I do not dare,” Li Zhichang said. “But let me ask Martial Brother Zhao: what kind of person was Founder Reverend Chongyang? What kind of people are the Quanzhen Seven Masters?”

“Our Founder, Master and all Uncle Masters are religious people who held high position in our Sect,” Zhao Zhijing answered with consternation.

“They were also real men and woman with determined spirits; patriotic citizens who protect suffering people without regard to their own lives. They took up arms fighting the Jin who invaded us,” Li Zhichang added.

“Reverend Chongyang and the Quanzhen Seven Masters are honorable people who have shaken the river and lake region [Jianghu]. Who in the martial arts world doesn’t respect them?” Zhao Zhijing tried to change the subject.

“I am deeply touched by our predecessors,” Li Zhichang boldly said. “Without exception they were fearless people who resolved to save other people through oceans of water and fire. They taught us the meaning of bravery. Our bodies may perish, but our honor will have to stand.”

His speech had touched Yin Zhiping’s heart, as well as more than ten other Martial Brothers’. Zhao Zhijing, on the other hand, kept pushing his agenda. He sneered and said, “Is Martial Brother Li the only one who is fearless about death? Do other people fear death and covet life? Our founder had undertaken great difficulties in founding our Sect. Our Sect has reached a high point today; I wonder how much pain and suffering the Founder and Quanzhen Seven Masters have suffered? If Quanzhen Sect fell due to our inability, how would we face our Founder in the underworld? How would we be accountable to the Five Masters when they finish their meditation?”

His speech sounded reasonable and several martial brothers voiced their support. Zhao Zhijing was encouraged and continued, “The Jin dynasty was our archenemy. Now the Mongolians have destroyed their country, wouldn’t that make them our ally? In the past our Founder was defeated by the

Jin which resulted in him living in seclusion inside the Ancient Tomb. If he knew his enemy was defeated, wouldn't his soul in heaven be comforted?"

After hearing his comments praising the enemy, Wang Zhitan, another of Qiu Chuji's disciples said, "If after defeating the Jin the Mongolians formed an alliance with our Great Song and lived in peace with our people we certainly would treat them as brothers. However, the Mongolian armed forces have continued their large scale maneuvers to the south fiercely attacking Xiangyang. Our Great Song is in grave danger. You, I and all of us are people of the Great Song. How could we accept the enemy's decree?" He turned his head to Yin Zhiping and asked, "Martial Brother Sect Leader, if you accept this decree, you are a traitor of China; you will be condemned forever by our Quanzhen Sect. I, Wang Zhitan; even if the blood of my neck splashes to the ground, will not let you disgrace us." He spoke with a solemn voice and stern countenance.

Zhao Zhijing leaped up and smacked the table. "Martial Brother Wang!" he bellowed, "Do you want to resort to violence? How dare you insolently threaten the Reverend Sect Leader?"

"We stand on justice!" Wang Zhitan harshly shot back. "Fight if you want, do you think I am afraid?"

Both sides looked in each other's eyes, ready to draw their swords to fight. A grey haired Taoist priest quickly intervened, "Hold! The Martial Brothers don't have to fight. We can talk it over."

"What is Senior Martial Brother's opinion?" Wang Zhitan asked, eyes bulging out.

"My opinion," the senior priest said, "We ... we are devout people, we have to have mercy toward the people, and we

have to help them. If ... if we accept the Mongolian Emperor's Imperial Decree, we will be able to persuade the Mongolian rulers and the officers not to commit atrocities. Didn't Fourth Martial Uncle Qiu Chuji do the same and was able to save a multitude of lives?" Several of Zhao Zhijing's supporters echoed their agreement.

A terse and forceful Taoist priest shook his head. "The circumstances then and today are beyond comparison. Junior followed Master's journey to the west and had met Genghis Khan himself. I saw with my own eyes how the Mongolian troops destroyed cities and massacred their people, and committed great atrocities. If we accept this decree, it means we fall under Mongolian influence. Wouldn't that mean we are assisting a tyrant to do evil? We might be able to save ten or twenty lives, but as the Mongolian power rises, I wonder how many thousands or tens of thousands people will die." The short and stocky priest who said that was Song Defang, one of nineteen disciples who came with Qiu Chuji to the west.

Zhao Zhijing smirked and said, "You have seen Genghis Khan, so what? I have recently met the Mongolian Fourth Prince, Khubilai. The Prince treats skilled martial artists and scholars with utmost courtesy. He is generous and open-minded; how could someone like him be ruthless?"

"Incredible!" Wang Zhitan shouted, "You have received Khubilai's order to spy on us!"

Zhao Zhijing was enraged, "What did you say?"

Wang Zhitan snapped, "Those who conspire with the Mongolians are traitors to our country!"

Zhao Zhijing made a sudden leap and thrust a palm toward Wang Zhitan's head. But as he started to move, two palms

blocked his attack. They belonged to Qiu Chuji's other two disciples, one of them was Qi Zhicheng.

“Shame!” Zhao Zhijing was livid and loudly shouted, “The disciples of Uncle Master Qiu Chuji rely on numbers to bully others.”

Yin Zhiping immediately clapped his palms and loudly said, “Martial Brothers! Please sit quietly. Listen to what Junior has to say.”

The Sect Leader position granted the bearer an enormous authority. They immediately sat down and did not dare to disobey. “Good,” Zhao Zhijing said, “Let us listen to what our Sect Leader has to say. If he wants to accept the decree, then we accept it. If he wants to refuse it, then we follow. The Imperial Decree is his; it’s neither mine nor yours. Why fight?”

He thought he had Yin Zhiping in his hands. Yin Zhiping would not dare to oppose him. On the other hand, Li Zhichang, Wang Zhitan and the others have known Yin Zhiping for quite some time. They knew he was loyal and patriotic. They were sure he would not betray the country and die as a traitor. They thought it was wise to leave the matter in his hands and let him to adjudicate.

“Junior does not have the competency and skill to hold the Sect Leader position. It was with a humble and heavy heart I accepted this weighty responsibility,” Yin Zhiping slowly said. “Who could have known that I would have to face this difficult matter on my very first day?” He looked up and stared blankly at the ceiling. Sixteen third generation disciples fixed their gaze on their Sect Leader. The room was quiet. Nobody made any noise.

After a long while Yin Zhiping finally continued, “The Quanzhen Sect was founded by Grand Master Chongyang.

After him came honorable Master Ma Yu, followed by Uncle Master Liu Chuxuan and my Master Qiu Chuji who carried forward their legacy. Now Junior has to carry the burden. How could I dare to disobey the basic teachings of my honorable predecessors? Martial Brothers! At present the Mongolian troops attack the city of Xiangyang, invade our land, and massacre our people. If it were any of the four Masters, would they accept, or would they refuse?"

The group listened carefully to his word, they reflected on how the Grand Martial Master Chongyang, Masters Ma Yu, Liu Chuxuan, and Qiu Chuji would usually handle such affairs: Founding Grand Master Chongyang died a long time ago, none of the third generation disciples had ever met him. Master Ma Yu was kind and honest; he would handle any matter quietly without much fanfare. Master Liu Chuxuan had profound insight; the disciples could never easily discern his thoughts. Master Qiu Chuji was like a raging fire. He was loyal and patriotic. The disciples had deep impressions of him, and without prior agreement they answered almost in unison, "Sect Leader Qiu Chuji would refuse the decree!"

"The Sect Leader now is you, not Uncle Master Qiu!" Zhao Zhijing shouted disrespectfully.

"Junior's talent is ordinary. I do not dare to violate our Masters' teaching. Moreover, I have committed a great sin, deserving of harsh punishment." After saying this Yin Zhiping hung his head. Nobody but Zhao Zhijing knew what he was talking about. They thought he was simply being modest. But 'a great sin, deserving harsh punishment' was a little bit too hard, unclear, and had nothing to do with the matter at hand.

Zhao Zhijing snorted; standing up he asked, "So, you have made the decision to refuse, hmm?"

“My insignificant life is worthless,” Yin Zhiping mournfully said. “But I can’t disgrace the Quanzhen name.” He started talking in low voice, but as he spoke the later sentence his voice was actually getting ardent. “Presently the heroes of our country have united themselves to fight the invaders. The Quanzhen Sect is known as an orthodox school of the central plains. How would we face the heroes of this world if we fall under Mongolian feet?”

His speech was applauded by loud cheers from Li Zhichang, Song Defang, Wang Zhitan, Qi Zhicheng and many others. “The Martial Brother Sect Leader’s words are true,” they enthusiastically said.

Zhao Zhijing flicked his sleeve and furiously walked out of the room. He paused at the doorway, sneered and coldly said, “Martial Brother Sect Leader, your words were pleasant to the ear. Heh, heh ... I am sure you know the consequences you can expect.” Then he turned around and walked briskly out.

As soon as he left many Taoists spoke at once. They agreed that Yin Zhiping had made a wise decision and praised him accordingly but about four or five Zhao Zhijing supporters also left the room without saying anything.

Yin Zhiping’s agony was unspeakable. He retreated to his own chamber. He knew that Zhao Zhijing would not take this setback lightly; Zhao would certainly reveal his secret to the public. He realized that he had condemned himself to die by declaring his intention to refuse the decree. He had suffered great anxiety and fear for several months, and now that he knew he was going to die, his mind became clear and his spirit calmed. With a steady hand he bolted the door of his chamber from inside. With a wry smile on his face he unsheathed his long sword and lifted it toward his throat ...

Just before the sword touched his skin, someone suddenly leaped from behind a book shelf and a hand reached toward the sword. Yin Zhiping did not expect this, he was caught off guard. The long sword suddenly flew from his hand. Startled he quickly turned his head only to see Zhao Zhijing with the long sword in his hand.

As Zhao Zhijing flaunted the sword in his hand he smirked and said "You have ruined the Sect Leader's reputation and now you think you can easily settle the score by dying? Not that easy! Miss Long is standing guard outside the Chongyang Palace. You tell me how we should answer her if she decides to come."

"Good!" Yin Zhiping answered, "Then I will come outside and slit my own throat in her presence to apologize."

"Even if you killed yourself, this matter is not over," Zhao Zhijing said. "After they finish their meditation, the Five Masters would certainly decide to investigate. You have ruined Quanzhen Sect's reputation. Surely you will be condemned forever!"

Yin Zhiping's spirit was crushed. Suddenly a cold sweat poured down his face. He fell into a chair, holding his head with both hands and desperately muttered, "What do you want? Tell me, what do you want me to do? If death is inadequate, then what ...?"

He had spoken to his fellow disciples with confidence, but now that he was alone with Zhao Zhijing, he unexpectedly lost his will to fight.

"Very well," Zhao Zhijing smiled. "If you leave this matter to me, I guarantee I will help you take care of the Miss Long problem, while at the same time preserving the Sect's and your own reputation. Definitely you will not have any trouble in the future."

“Do you want me to accept the Imperial Decree?” asked Yin Zhiping anxiously.

“No! No! I don’t want you to accept the Imperial Decree,” Zhao Zhijing answered.

Yin Zhiping was relieved. “What then? Tell me quickly! I will certainly listen to you,” he anxiously asked.

After an hour, the bell in the hall sounded and everyone assembled there. Li Zhichang instructed all of Qiu Chuji’s disciples to conceal weapons under their gowns in case Yin Zhiping was coerced into submission by Zhao Zhijing and his supporters. The Taoists filled the hall; their faces grim and filled with anxiety.

Yin Zhiping stepped out slowly from the inner hall and his face was very pale. He stopped in the centre and said, “My fellow Taoist brothers, I have been commanded by Head Priest Qiu to assume the Sect Leader’s position, but unfortunately I have contracted a terminal illness which cannot be cured...” This came like a bolt from the blue and many Taoists involuntarily exclaimed, “Ah!” Yin Zhiping continued, “I cannot undertake such a heavy responsibility, and I hereby appoint Elder Wang’s most senior disciple Zhao Zhijing to assume the Sect Leader position!”

When he said this, the hall was filled with an unnatural silence which only lasted for a moment. Then Li Zhichang, Wang Zhitan, Song Defang and company opposed loudly, “Priest Qiu wanted Brother Yin Zhiping to become the Sect Leader, how can you pass it on to others?” “You’re supposed to be fine, how did you contract a terminal illness?” “There must be some huge conspiracy behind this; you must have fallen into a trap.” The Fourth Generation disciples did not dare speak loudly but they were all debating among themselves. The hall was thrown into confusion. Li Zhichang

and company glared at Zhao Zhijing but he looked indifferent to the matter and just folded his arms silently.

Yin Zhiping raised his hands and waited for everyone to become silent. He then said, "This is indeed very sudden, you're not at fault for your reactions. Our sect is facing a great disaster and I have committed a great sin - so great that even death cannot atone for it." When he said this, he grimaced and continued, "I have thought carefully and I found that only Brother Zhao Zhijing is capable enough to lead our sect through this crisis. Everyone must not look upon him with prejudice but assist him in bringing glory to our sect."

Li Zhichang said clearly, "It's human to err. As for your sin, just await the five elders return from their meditation and then report the matter to them. We really cannot acknowledge your abdication."

Yin Zhiping sighed, "Brother Li Zhichang, we've been friends for many years and are as close as brothers. Please just cooperate and don't make things difficult for me."

Li Zhichang was full of suspicions and saw that Yin Zhiping looked like he was seriously troubled and his speech had little conviction so he gave up arguing and hung his head in silence. Wang Zhitan said, "If you really wish to abdicate, you should still wait for the five elders to return and investigate carefully to prevent any foolish decisions."

Yin Zhiping sadly said, "This is too urgent to postpone."

Wang Zhitan said, "Even so, among our generation of brothers, there are many who surpass Brother Zhao in character and leadership abilities. Brother Li Zhichang is well-versed in the Tao while Brother Song Defang is able at handling other matters. Why, then, do you choose the unpopular Brother Zhao?"

Zhao Zhijing had a hot-tempered character and he tried very hard to restrain himself. Now he could not control himself and he laughed coldly, "Then what about the brave Brother Wang Zhitan?"

Wang Zhitan angrily said, "I'm not very capable and I cannot be compared to our fellow brothers. But compared to Brother Zhao, I'm superior." He laughed and stared at the ceiling; his manner was extremely arrogant. Wang Zhitan said loudly, "My martial arts and sword skills may not be superior to Brother Zhao's but at least I wouldn't be a traitor."

Zhao Zhijing lost his control and shouted, "If you have the guts then say it clearly, who's the traitor?" The exchange of words became more intense and heated.

Yin Zhiping said, "Please don't quarrel and listen to me." They stopped arguing but still glared at each other. Yin Zhiping said, "Our sect's constitution decrees that the position of the Sect Leader will be appointed by the previous Sect Leader and not nominated by the Taoist Brothers, is that right?" Everyone unanimously shouted, "Yes!" Yin Zhiping said, "I hereby appoint Zhao Zhijing to succeed me as the new Sect Leader. Do not oppose this. Brother Zhao, please come forward and listen to them." Zhao Zhijing proudly swaggered forward and bowed.

Wang Zhitan and Song Defang still wanted to speak but Li Zhichang held their sleeves and signaled to them with his eyes. They knew he was apt at handling matters and must have planned something so they remained silent. Li Zhichang whispered, "Zhao Zhijing must have some hold over Brother Yin rendering him incapable of any opposition. We must secretly investigate his devious plan then we can contend with him. Let's just obey Brother Yin for now. If we oppose him now, it may reflect badly on us." They nodded

their heads in agreement and acknowledged the Sect Leader's command.

The Quanzhen Sect experienced two change-of-command ceremonies in one day so, of course, many were surprised and found it hard to accept.

Once the ceremony was over, he stood at the centre and bade his own disciples to stand guard at his sides. He said, "Invite in the Mongol Khan's envoy." Wang Zhitan wanted to abuse him verbally when he heard this but Li Zhichang stopped him with his eye signals. Before long, four disciples escorted the Mongolian envoy and Xiaoxiang Zi into the hall.

Zhao Zhijing quickly rushed forward to welcome him and laughed, saying, "Please come in!" The envoy had already waited for a very long time and was getting impatient. Now he saw that Yin Zhiping was absent his face became blacker. One of the escorts knew what was bothering him and said, "Our Sect Leader's position is now undertaken by Master Zhao." The Mongol envoy was surprised and delighted and said, "Oh, I see! Congratulations!" He cupped his hands to salute him. Xiaoxiang Zi was standing two feet behind but his zombie-like face did not display any emotion.

Zhao Zhijing brought the envoy into the main hall and said, "Your Honor, please announce the Edict."

The envoy smiled and thought, "A person like you should have been made the Sect Leader originally and not that previous leader." He took out the Edict and opened it. Zhao Zhijing knelt on the floor and heard the envoy say, "Quanzhen Sect's Leader is hereby conferred..."

Li Zhichang and the others saw Zhao Zhijing kneel down and accept the edict respectfully and exchanged glances. They suddenly drew their swords from under their gowns and the flashes were seen throughout the hall. Wang Zhitan and

Song Defang rushed up and pointed their swords at Zhao Zhijing's back. Li Zhichang shouted, "Our sect's most important commandment is loyalty, we'll never surrender to the Mongolians. Zhao Zhijing betrayed our ancestors and abandoned our honour, he shall not remain as the sect's leader." Another four Taoists drew their swords and surrounded the envoy and Xiaoxiang Zi.

This sudden change of events was too abrupt. Although Zhao Zhijing knew Li Zhichang was very unhappy with him, he thought the power and prestige of the Sect Leader's position would prevent anyone from daring to rebel. He assumed that if he became the leader he would be the highest-ranking member of the sect and even the Five Elder Masters could not oppose his orders easily. He obviously never expected the others to take action against the Sect Leader. Now swords were pointed at his back; he was shocked and angry but he did not show it. He shouted, "You rebellious disciples! You dare to create trouble?"

Wang Zhitan shouted, "Traitor! If you move we'll make two holes right through you!"

Although Zhao Zhijing's skills were better than theirs, this was unexpected as he was attacked while kneeling down so he had no chance to retaliate. Zhao Zhijing had instructed about ten of his trusted supporters to bring weapons along with them. But Li Zhichang and company were Qiu Chuji's disciples who were well-respected in the sect and they acted swiftly and suddenly. Many of Zhao Zhijing's close supporters did not dare make a move. A few did try to draw their weapons but their accupoints were sealed the moment their arms moved. Among them were Zhang Zhiguang whose face was injured by Granny Sun, Jia Zhifan who once fought with Lu Wushuang and Zhao Zhijing's disciple Lu Qingdu.

Li Zhichang said to the envoy, "Mongolia is now at war with the Song Empire and we are citizens of the Song Empire. How can we accept a Mongolian edict? Please leave; when we meet on the battlefield we shall talk again." He said this with gusto and many Taoists in the hall cheered when they heard this.

The envoy flashed his sword and did not betray any emotions, laughing coldly, "You people have acted rashly today. You don't know what's good for you. The glory of the Quanzhen Sect shall be destroyed soon, what a pity."

Li Zhichang replied, "Our territories have been leveled by your armies; we are only a small sect, how can we withstand you? But if you don't leave soon, don't blame me for being impolite, I can't control myself much longer."

Xiaoxiang Zi sneered, "Impolite? How? I want to see it!" He stretched out his long arms and snatched Song Defang and Wang Zhitan's swords. Zhao Zhijing immediately jumped up and executed the "White Clouds Exiting the Cave" to defend his back and then he stood next to the envoy. Xiaoxiang Zi handed him one of the swords and slashed the other sword towards Li Zhichang. Li Zhichang raised his sword to parry but his hand became numb when his sword hit the other sword. He tried to use his internal strength to resist the sword but the two swords snapped.

Xiaoxiang Zi's strokes in snatching and deflecting swords were extremely fast and in the blink of an eye he raised his hands and threw out his palms, disarming four senior Quanzhen disciples. He carried out three strokes continuously and defeated seven Quanzhen experts. The several hundred people in the hall were shocked; they did not expect this zombie-faced man to be so highly-skilled.

Zhao Zhijing has never thought greatly of Wang Zhitan and Song Defang and now that he was trapped in a kneeling

position by them in front of so many people, he was furious and stabbed towards Wang Zhitan. This “Big River Heads East” move was one of Quanzhen’s most powerful and swiftest sword techniques. The sword sliced through the air and thrust towards Wang Zhitan’s abdomen.

Wang Zhitan quickly jumped back to evade the thrust. Zhao Zhijing’s sword moves were merciless and aimed to take his life and the tip of the sword followed within two feet of him. It seemed as though Wang Zhitan could no longer evade this blow and everyone looked at them stunned. Suddenly a sleeve flew out and wrapped around the sword. The sleeve was ripped apart but the sword was impeded and Wang Zhitan was able to jump to safety. Two swords were quickly stretched out to block Zhao Zhijing’s sword. The man with the torn sleeve was Yin Zhiping.

Zhao Zhijing was very angry and pointed at him, shouting, “You... you... How dare you do that?”

Yin Zhiping said, “Brother Zhao, you promised not to accept the Mongolian edict. That’s why I abdicated in your favour. How could you go back on your word in such a short time?”

Zhao Zhijing said, “You asked me, ‘Do you want me to accept the Mongolian edict?’ I said, ‘No, I’d never want you to accept the edict!’ How did I break my word? The one accepting the edict is me, not you.”

Yin Zhiping muttered, “So it’s like that, you’re despicable!”

Now Li Zhichang took a sword from one of his disciples and shouted, “My good Quanzhen brothers, we’ll still recognize Master Yin as our sect leader. Let’s arrest this traitor Zhao and punish him according to our Sect Leader’s ruling!” He charged up and fought with Zhao Zhijing. Wang Zhitan, Song Defang and five other Taoists quickly got into the ‘Big Dipper Formation’ and surrounded Xiaoxiang Zi. Although Xiaoxiang

Zi's martial arts were good, he could not comprehend the formation's changes and he saw seven people flying up and down in front of him and he became confused.

The envoy had already retreated into a corner when he saw that things were not going right. He quickly took out a horn and blew it. Two Taoists rushed up and snatched the horn and captured him. They were however a split second late and the horn had sounded out clearly.

Yin Zhiping knew he had summoned reinforcements and knew that danger was near. He was suddenly jolted into attention and commanded, "Brother Qi Zhicheng, watch this Mongolian official. Brother Yu Daoxian, Brother Wang Zhijin, take three brothers to help Brother Sun guard the Jade Cave at the back of the mountain to prevent any Mongol soldiers from distracting the Five Elder Masters from their meditation. Brother Chen Zhiyi, take six people to guard the front of the mountain. Fang Zhiqi, take six people to guard the left side of the mountain. Liu Daoning, take six people and guard the right side of the mountain."

The people guarding the left and right were all his fellow disciples under Qiu Chuji. Among the people sent to guard the Jade Cave, Yu Daoxian was Liu Chuxuan's disciple while Wang Zhijin was Hao Datong's disciple. Liu Chuxuan and Hao Datong were meditating inside the cave and these two disciples were upright and honest, so they would not allow harm to their masters. Yin Zhiping had made such careful arrangements in such a short time and he made sure there were trustworthy people guarding every strategic position. Everyone could support each other effectively. Even if a large body of troops attacked them, it would be hard for them to get through the defenses. Everyone saw that his eyes were keen and alert and his commands clear and forceful. His manner so imposing that none dared disobey him and all carried out the orders without question.

Suddenly they heard shouting and weapons clashing outside. A few Taoists were still moving to take their positions when there was a whistle and a few dozen people jumped over the wall. The troops from the east were led by Yin Kexi, the west by Nimoxing and the front by Ma Guangzuo; their troops were veterans who had been involved in the Khan's western expedition.

Khubilai had been attacking Xiangyang for many months and an illness broke out in the Mongolian army. This, coupled with their failure at the siege, caused the army to withdraw. The body of troops that Xiao Longnu saw speedily heading south previously was the last division to attack Xiangyang. Before the army withdrew Khubilai ordered his men to recruit capable men from the Central Plains. The Mongol Khan's edict to take over the Quanzhen Sect was part of Khubilai's plan. However, he knew the Quanzhen Sect was loyal and upright, so they may not submit. He ordered Jinlun Fawang to lead skilled Wulin fighters to wait near Mount Zhongnan. If the Quanzhen Sect rejected the edict, they would use force to bring it under their control.

Mount Zhongnan's security was usually very tight but in just one day they experienced two leadership changes and Chongyang Palace was thrown into chaos. Those who were supposed to guard the mountain were recalled to witness the change-of-command ceremony. Therefore it was only when Yin Kexi, Nimoxing and company got right up to the Chongyang Palace that they were discovered. Their sudden appearance caught the Quanzhen Sect unprepared and many of the defenders had not even left the hall. There were enemy soldiers in all directions and although the Taoists outnumbered the enemy forces, most of them were unarmed. Moreover they were surrounded and could only crowd into a small area. The commanding positions all lacked the manpower and it looked like they were going to be utterly defeated.

The Mongolian envoy who was held captive by Qi Zhicheng shouted, "Disciples of Quanzhen Sect, throw down your weapons and suffer your Sect Leader Zhao's punishment."

Yin Zhiping said, "Zhao Zhijing betrayed our founder and masters by surrendering to the enemy; he has committed a great sin and therefore is no longer our Sect Leader." Although he saw that the situation was highly unfavorable, he decided to put up a struggle and repel the enemy. Many of them fought barehanded and before long, there were more than ten dead bodies scattered around the hall. Yin Zhiping, Li Zhichang, Wang Zhitan, Song Defang and Qi Zhicheng and others were either injured, had lost their weapons, had their accupoints blocked or even killed. The rest were forced into a corner by Yin Kexi's troops and could not retaliate.

The envoy's rank was very high and even Yin Kexi, Xiaoxiang Zi and their soldiers had to obey him. He saw his side had gained a complete victory and said to Zhao Zhijing, "Master Zhao, I'll save you face. I won't report the Quanzhen Sect's rebellion to the Khan."

Zhao Zhijing bowed and thanked him profusely and suddenly remembered something. He quickly turned to Xiaoxiang Zi and whispered, "I need a big favour from you. My five masters are meditating at the back of the mountain. If they suddenly rush here, then... this..."

Xiaoxiang Zi dryly said, "So be it. I'll help you fight them."

Zhao Zhijing did not dare say anymore but was not satisfied. He worried, "Don't underestimate the Five Masters, if they really come here you won't defeat them so easily. If they really drive the Mongolians away, it'll be hard for me to keep my life."

The envoy said, "Master Zhao, you will first accept the imperial edict and then you will punish your rebellious

disciples.” Zhao Zhijing said, “Yes!” He knelt down to listen to the edict.

Yin Zhiping, Li Zhichang and the others had their hands and feet bound. When they heard the envoy read the edict and saw Zhao Zhijing kowtowing and thanking him, they became livid with anger. Song Defang sat next to Li Zhichang and whispered to him, “Brother Li untie my bonds. I’ll dash out and report the matter to the Five Masters.” Li Zhichang leaned back and circulated his internal strength and exerted it with his fingers. He managed to undo the bonds and whispered, “Please report calmly. Don’t shock the Five Masters – they are now cultivating their internal energy...” Song Defang nodded his head.

After reading the edict, Zhao Zhijing stood up and the envoy and Xiaoxiang Zi congratulated him.

Song Defang suddenly saw many people get up and surround Zhao Zhijing. He quickly got up and dashed behind the deities’ statues. Nimoxing shouted, “Stop right there!” He obviously did not care and ran off as fast as he could. Nimoxing’s legs were amputated so he could not give chase so he waved his hand, throwing out a snake-like dart. The dart hit Song Defang’s left leg. Nimoxing shouted, “Go down!” He slowed for a while but did not collapse. Instead he tolerated the pain and continued running. The Chongyang Palace was huge and complex; he turned a few times and the Mongolian troops lost him.

Song Defang got outside, extracted the dart, and bandaged his wound. He went to the medicine room and took a sword and ran to the back of the mountain. He came around a row of pine trees and got to the Jade Cave’s entrance. He groaned in dismay. There were several Mongol soldiers there lifting rocks to block the entrance. A tall, skinny monk stood there and beside him were two people directing the soldiers. He

immediately recognized the two people to be Da'erba and Hou Du and knew that their skills were not below that of Hao Datong's. The tall monk looked extraordinary and his martial arts appeared to be much better than the other two. The entrance was now almost eighty percent covered and he did not know if the Five Masters were still alive. He thought, "Master has treated me very well and today he is in trouble; I must sacrifice my life to save them, or my presence in the world will have been in vain."

He knew very well that by going up to stop them he would surely lose his life and would still be unable to help the Five Masters. However the Quanzhen Sect was having a great disaster so he would not save his own skin. He unsheathed his sword and rushed out from behind a tree. The sword flew through the air and thrust towards the tall monk. He wanted to kill off their leader, and if he succeeded he would throw the group into confusion.

Unfortunately the monk was none other than Jinlun Fawang. He had already questioned Zhao Zhijing about the situation at the Quanzhen Sect and headed straight to the Jade Cave on reaching the mountain. He knew that once he trapped the Five Masters, the third and fourth generation disciples would be powerless to resist.

Song Defang's sword was less than a foot away from Fawang's back and he seemed not to notice him, so he was secretly happy. Suddenly a golden light flashed and Fawang held out a round golden wheel and smashed his sword. Song Defang shouted in pain and the sword flew out of his hand. He was internally injured and threw up a pool of blood. He became giddy and vaguely heard people shouting around him but he did not know what had happened and fainted.

Fawang had also heard shouting from the hall but with Xiaoxiang Zi, Yin Kexi and the other experts there, he did not

think anything amiss and didn't pay any attention. He only told his men to cover the entrance quickly to prevent Qiu Chuji and the others from charging out and wasting his energy.

Once Song Defang left the hall, the situation changed again. The envoy said to Zhao Zhijing, "Master Zhao, the people who stirred up trouble were numerous; I think your position is not very secure."

Zhao Zhijing also knew the people were unhappy with him and would immediately turn on him once Xiaoxiang Zi and the others left. Since it had already come to this, he said loudly, "According to our sect's rules, those who disobey the Sect Leader should be punished?" The Taoists remained silent but they all thought, "You disobeyed the Sect Leader yourself." Zhao Zhijing repeated his question and stared at his disciple Lu Qingdu, wanting him to answer. Lu Qingdu said, "Execution in front of the Three Deities' statues."

Zhao Zhijing said, "Correct! Yin Zhiping, do you admit your offense?"

Yin Zhiping said, "No!"

Zhao Zhijing said, "OK! Bring him here!" Lu Qingdu pushed Yin Zhiping forward and stood in front of the statues. Zhao Zhijing also asked Li Zhichang, Wang Zhitan and the others, but everyone said, "No!" Among those captured however, were some who feared for their lives and had submitted, so Zhao Zhijing ordered their bonds to be untied. Altogether there were twenty-four people who did not submit and Wang Zhitan could not control his fiery temper and he cursed and swore.

Zhao Zhijing said, "You're so stubborn. Even though I, the Sect Leader, am merciful, I won't be able to spare you. Lu Qingdu, do you act on behalf of our founder!" Lu Qingdu

said, "Yes!" He raised his sword and killed Yu Daoxian who was first in the line.

Yu Daoxian was warm and kind and he had many friends in the Quanzhen Sect. When they saw Lu Qingdu execute him, they shouted in fury. What Song Defang and Fawang heard was their cries of protest. Yin Kexi waved his hand and several Mongolian soldiers blocked the Taoists.

When Lu Qingdu saw such fierce reaction, he was afraid. Zhao Zhijing said, "Quickly do it, why are you delaying?" Lu Qingdu said, "Yes!" He raised his sword and killed another two people. The fourth person in the queue was Yin Zhiping and just as Lu Qingdu raised his sword to stab his chest, a female voice coldly said, "Stop! Do not kill him."

Lu Qingdu turned around and saw a young lady in white. It was Xiao Longnu. She said, "Step aside! Let me kill him."

End of Chapter 25.

Chapter 26 - Divine Eagle's Heavy Sword

Translated by Hanky Panky, Athena, BeeDreamer & Lanny Lin



The clusters of swords hovering and fiercely swaying about amongst the three's weapons. Xiao Longnu was using the "Tight Encirclement Force" (Tian Luo Di Wang Shi), smoothly seizing a sword and lunging out several moves, then quickly retreating back from the enemy.

Xiao Longnu saw the Quanzhen Sect's group of Taoists riot, the Mongolian warriors raiding on a large scale, every dispute seemed from her viewpoint like a cloud of mist, she paid no attention to them. But seeing Lu Qingdu raise his sword to kill Yin Zhiping, how could she let someone try to kill him? Therefore, she immediately ran up front to block the attack.

When Zhao Zhijing saw Xiao Longnu suddenly advancing into the temple, he felt delighted: "Throughout the whole journey I've been chased by you without a moment's pause for breath; now, with so many experts around, you're literally searching for death, it truly is a gift from heaven!" He called out: "The demon girl is not a good person, seize her for me!" The Mongolian warriors didn't take notice of his orders; they didn't even lift a finger. Zhao Zhijing's two close followers heard their master's command, rushed forward, and tried to grab both her arms.

Before their hands reached her sleeve, the fight, from their perspective, was moving as fast as lightning, and then their wrists felt a burst of severe pain. In haste they leapt back. What had happened was that from her waist Xiao Longnu pulled out two swords. In the blink of an eye, their wrists were struck by the swords; the carpal bones were almost broken and the wrists were drenched with blood. The move was extremely quick; people did not have time to clearly see how she brought out the swords, attacked the two Taoists, wounded them and moved away. Those watching couldn't help but feel startled.

Lu Qingdu called out: "Great comrades let's attack together, our many hands will provide great strength. Who cares what that demon girl's origins are?" He thought that however skilful Xiao Longnu might be, she's merely a young woman; once everybody rushes forward, their victory is assured. The vanguard thrust their swords to pierce Xiao Longnu. Xiao Longnu's sharp swords vibrated, Lu Qingdu's left wrist, right wrist, left leg, and right leg had been struck by her sword, with a loud howl, he collapsed on the floor. The thrust of the two swords was even quicker than before; even experts such as Xiaoxiang Zi and Yin Kexi gazed at each other with pale faces. They'd previously seen her fight Gongsun Zhi at Passionless Valley. At that time her sword stances were fine and ingenious, but they were definitely not as unbelievable as they were now.

Xiao Longnu was taught how to separate her mind for two uses by Zhou Botong, the Left/Right Mutual Combat Technique; between her innate abilities and his teaching, her martial arts had multiplied. With Yang Guo forming the Dueling Sword Combination and using the 'Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden Sword Technique', few have matched it under the heavens. Now, as one person, she can use two swords simultaneously, with outstanding power. Regardless of how two people's intentions are interlinked with each other, it's still inferior to one person's lightning-like alertness during battle. At this moment, although her sword method's energy and strength weren't as good as two people teaming up, her moves are faster in comparison by many times.

Throughout her lengthy trailing of Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing, she was depressed for days on end, not knowing what way to dispose of them. Within that moment that the Quanzhen Taoist's commander launched an attack, she took the opportunity to retaliate. Once she saw blood on the tip of her sword, she felt grief and indignation; suddenly she broke away from her attackers. Seeing her white garment drifting

about, like cold flickering light and both swords seeming like two silver snakes wandering inside the temple. Ding-dong, qiang-long sounds accompanied by comments of "Oh!", "This is bad" were heard. Instantly, the Quanzhen Taoists' swords dropped on the floor, everyone of them had felt the thrust of her swords on their wrists. Even more bizarre was that she used the same maneuver "Hoary Wrist Jade Bracelet", yet all that the Taoists saw was the flash of the sword brush past their eyes. Their wrists felt intense pain and they were left helpless. They had been easily disposed of with no chance to parry any of the strikes. This group of Taoists could have been killed effortlessly one by one.

After the Taoists were injured, they withdrew in deep shock. In front of the three statues were Yin Zhiping and a bunch of bound Taoists.

Xiao Longnu studied her Left/Right Mutual Combat Technique alone and practiced it a couple of times in the wilderness, but she'd never exchanged blows with anyone. Today she had the opportunity to try out these new techniques, and even she could not have dreamed of possessing such might; she was unexpectedly startled.

Realizing the situation wasn't fortuitous; Zhao Zhijing rapidly pulled a sword from his Taoist robe to protect himself, and at the same time retreated. Xiao Longnu was full of hatred towards him and as she moved in, both swords completely blocked the routes to his front and back. Zhao Zhijing brandished his sword in order to gain a path, but only the ding-dang sounds of swords clashing could be heard.

Yin Kexi said: "You won't succeed, get out of the way!" He had already obstructed Xiao Longnu's sword as he lashed out his Golden Dragon Whip. Xiao Longnu had injured 10 people one after another, up to this point, but one person was able to catch her single sword.

Xiao Longnu spoke: "Today I came here to seek my revenge against the Quanzhen Sect's Taoists, it does not involve others, stay out of the way."

Now Yin Kexi saw how her sword was chasing like wind and clouds, even he lost his nerve. But he was, after all, a first-class expert; he could not cower in fear because of someone's words. So he laughed and replied: "Among the Quanzhen Sect's Taoists the good and bad are intermingled; there are a dozen few who deserve to be killed, but who are those that offended you and deserve to die Miss?"

Xiao Longnu made an "ng" sound, and didn't pay further attention to him. Yin Kexi thought, "First I will establish a friendship with her so even if I'm no match for her, it won't result in death. If the situation is not right he would concede defeat. If other people know that we're acquainted with each other, they won't ridicule me for being cowardly". Consequently he laughingly called out: "Dragon Girl, don't waste any more time, your precious body is pure and healthy!" Xiao Longnu made another "ng" sound, her eyes did not move away from Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing, fearing that they might seize an opportunity to slip away. Yin Kexi uttered: "Don't dirty your hands on the deceitful Taoists, just point them out. Let me offer my services, and one by one they will be punished for Miss."

Xiao Longnu replied: "Good! Then kill him for me first." She pointed at Zhao Zhijing.

Yin Kexi thought: "This person has been imperially conferred by the Mongolian Da-Han, how can I kill him?" Then he laughed: "Immortal Zhao treats others very well, I'm afraid there's been some misunderstanding Miss. I'll tell him to come to Miss and apologize in front of you!"

Xiao Longnu's beautiful eyebrows slightly frowned. She thrust her left sword out, as fast as a bolt of lightning,

heading for Yin Kexi. Yin Kexi hurriedly raised his whip to ward it off. There was one sound of "Ah"; for standing behind was Zhao Zhijing who was stabbed in the shoulder. Xiaoxiang Zi and his class of experts couldn't tell how the thrust was made. They all assumed it was the right hand sword that was thrust out, twisting past Yin Kexi's body, and piercing the person hiding behind him.

Yin Kexi was deeply surprised, he thought, "This sword may not have hit me, but I was powerless to guard Zhao Zhijing, that is also a disgrace". His opponent's move was very fast, he just couldn't follow her twin sword's route and oncoming force; if he continued to fight her in this way he will definitely lose. The more he thought of this, the more cowardly he became; with a swing of the Golden Dragon Whip, he bellowed: "Miss Dragon Girl, please be merciful!" Xiao Longnu didn't care since she didn't regard him as an enemy, or a friend; without slowing her pace, she stepped twice to the left. Yin Kexi followed with one turn, still wanting to protect Zhao Zhijing, but suddenly heard moaning behind him. Slowly turning his head around, he saw Zhao Zhijing's robe sleeves had been neatly split into two parts by the point of her sword and blood came running from the wounds. How Xiao Longnu had pierced him, the other people were still completely baffled by it. Her rapid and skilful sword methods had reached a point where not only do her routes leave no trace, it's as if she can block one person and still injure her foe at will.

Zhao Zhijing has been consecutively pierced twice. Realizing that Yin Kexi's martial arts were average, he knew he could not count on him for protection. In imminent danger he took a deep breath and scurried over to the side of Xiaoxiang Zi. Xiao Longnu acted as though she never noticed it. She turned her body and with force, aimed her left hand sword at Yin Kexi, yet her right sword was directed at Nimoxing's chest. Whilst supporting himself with his left hand on his

crutch, Nimoxing's right hand used the steel snake to block. But then he heard Zhao Zhijing crying out loudly, followed by a 'qiang-long' sound, as his sword fell. His wrist has been poked by her sword yet again. That move was even more peculiar. It was obvious that Xiao Longnu was far beyond him. Somehow, while attacking two formidable fighters, she managed to find time to wound him again.

Xiaoxiang Zi grunted and said: "Miss Dragon Girl's sword techniques are not bad at all; I also want to challenge you." His left hand threw a palm from his side, but at that instant Zhao Zhijing felt a great force meeting his shoulder. He lost his footing, and flew several zhang (ten+feet) away. Fortunately his inner energy has considerable foundation; though his body may have been wounded three times, he was able to get up on his feet. Xiaoxiang Zi's palm force had not yet arrived and the cane attacked at the same moment.

Ma Guangzuo had long been good friends with Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu; his mind felt that this was far from right, and spoke loudly: "Three Wulin Masters ganging up on a young girl. Don't you want to save face?"

Once Xiaoxiang Zi and others heard this, their faces showed signs of anger. Throughout their lives they had paid no attention to such things as virtue or morality; however arrogance, pride, and dignity were still regarded as extremely important to their identity. To mention three people ganging up, why, they wouldn't even consider fighting such a young girl even one-on-one. But they knew, certainly, that relying on one person was impossible, since they wouldn't be able to resist her supernaturally unfathomable sword movements. They could only pretend not to have heard those demeaning comments made by Ma Guangzuo. They were thinking: "What a stupid fool! We're all handling the same affair here, and yet you help an outsider? When we're done I'll teach you a lesson." While their minds were filled with these thoughts,

before their eyes, the flash of the sword shone. Xiao Longnu had already made a move. The three fighters still couldn't follow the paths of her swords, so they leapt backwards together. They moved away a few zhangs, not wanting to get caught up with each other, all the while brandishing their weapons and protecting their body's vital parts.

Numerous Mongolian warriors led Yin Zhiping, Li Zhichang, Wang Zhitan and others near the temple wall. They all knew that the battle between the four was not to be taken lightly, all that was needed was for one person's weapon to be close to you; if you didn't die then you'd definitely sustain a serious injury.

Xiaoxiang Zi, Nimoxing and Yin Kexi all expected her to attack the other person first, so long as they're able to spot clues in her moves, then they will have chance of victory. The three fighters had the same intentions, consequently everyone of them executed unique skills, protecting their bodies without revealing vulnerable gaps, seeking a no win situation, in order to win. The three fighters, while attacking, adopted a defensive position together, this was a rare occasion in itself. But since their adversary is this strong, if they rush ahead and make an assault, the search for glory most likely would backfire on them.

Within the temple, Xiao Longnu's twin swords faced the floor, and she stood in the centre, while Xiaoxiang Zi and the other two placed themselves in an individual spot. Each one of them had a cold light shimmering about in front of them. Yin Kexi's Golden Whip flourished into a round yellow light; Nimoxing's Steel Snake illuminated strips of dark reflections; Xiaoxiang Zi's cane stirred into a grey screen, all blocking in front of them.

Xiao Longnu observed the three fighters one by one, thinking: "I have no enmity towards the three of you, and not

enough time to fight with you?" Noticing that Zhao Zhijing was dodging and sneaking away and just when he was about to step behind a statue, she brushed her white sleeves, and moved in. Nimoxing and Xiaoxiang Zi separately dashed to the left and right, the steel snake and cane rushed in front of her, they had allied themselves. Their attack may not have been enough, but protecting themselves was their priority. Seeing that there were no loopholes to exploit, Xiao Longnu's twin swords did not immediately move outward. She saw that Zhao Zhijing was trying to escape through the back; she held her swords and darted forward two steps; however Nimoxing's and Xiaoxiang Zi's weapons whizzed like the wind blowing and she was unable to get past them. Xiao Longnu said: "Will you not let me pass?"

Xiaoxiang Zi thought: "A feud has not started between us yet, she might not massacre any of us. What would I benefit from this Quanzhen ringleader; why should I bother to make enemies with this strong girl?" He hesitated but did not answer.

Nimoxing replied: "We insist on not letting you past, what can a demon girl like you do about it? Why don't you try and get pass us?"

Xiaoxiang Zi and Yin Kexi both stared down at him and both thought: "We're stuck with not letting her past, but why must there be abusive remarks? Can it be that you alone can match her skills? You truly overrate yourself." But since they're uniting their efforts to ward off the enemy, it was not convenient to complain about each other.

They did not realize both legs of Nimoxing were removed because of Yang Guo's and Li Mochou's co-operation. He knew Yang Guo was Xiao Longnu's sweetheart, so his anger must be released on her; at that point he made a move, the

move was very different from the other two's, his intentions were to fight desperately to see who dies and who lives.

Xiao Longnu showed no anger at all, only knowing that in order to kill the two Taoists Yin and Zhao she must drive away the three experts in front of her. She coolly responded: "Since you're not going to let me get past, then forgive me!" Right after she finished her words, without warning her swords' light flashed by and a single noise was heard; and it spread itself into the distance without pausing. The noise hadn't yet subsided, but Xiao Longnu had already retreated back over ten feet returning to the centre of the temple. Xiaoxiang Zi's and Nimoxing's faces revealed no colour. The prolonged noise was formed by around forty continuous attacks in a greatly constricted amount of time. Within that moment, Xiao Longnu's two swords slashed out, cut, skimmed and chopped, and made forty moves. Nimoxing and Xiaoxiang Zi were defending as tight as could be imagined, every one of her moves collided with the top of their weapons. To the bystander's ears, all that was heard were the recurring noises of the clashing weaponry and nothing was seen at all.

Her attacks were so fast that Xiaoxiang Zi and the others were even more panicked. When they were able to impede her sword slashes, they were totally dependant on their method of flourishing their weapons in such a way that nothing was going to get past them. They left barely a loophole to be seen. If they waited for her swords to extend completely, then both of them would have tasted the sharp blades. Xiao Longnu had admired their individual ways of defending closely and her swift range of assaults was to no avail. She paused for a slight moment, and drifted backward, but her eyes were still locked onto Xiaoxiang Zi. Then her two swords suddenly reversed their slashes and twelve rapid sounds of ding, ding, ding came so fast that even a skilled player of the lute's complex way of playing wouldn't have

that kind of speed. Yin Kexi's golden whip never rested and was busy blocking those twelve attacks right from the start.

After two periods of attacking and defending were finished, the four of them understood each other. Xiao Longnu was unfortunate not to have stronger inner energy and therefore her sword moves lacked the potency that's needed to disarm her opponents. Had she roughly similar inner energy to either of the three, their defense would've been breached long before. Xiao Longnu backtracked to the centre of the temple, and tried to conceive a plan to break past the enemy. She saw that the more they brandished their weapons the faster they became; where can she find the least bit of a weak point?

She thought: "Wielding weapons at this sort of tempo will lead to an excessive exhaustion of inner energy, surely then I won't last for long. I need to be patient and wait for a change; as the time drags on I will then be able to find a flaw. Even if Zhao Zhijing manages to escape, no matter where he goes I'll find him in the end." Thereupon her two swords trembled slightly, appearing as though she's going to attack or maybe not going to attack. She was storing up valuable energy ready to be unleashed. But she won't make the move yet and thus not leave her three opponents any small moments of relaxation. However, although Xiaoxiang Zi and his partner's inner energy was deep and profound, wielding weapons in such a way will make their physical energy drop below normal levels in a short time period. As Xiao Longnu saw no loophole to exploit, she quietly stood there with an elegant expression on her face, her mood severe. With her temperament, she had generally never been anxious before. Throughout her journey of following Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing for months she'd never even laid a hand on them. Now, if she had to wait for another day, why not? For 20 years she'd been quietly keeping watch over the Ancient

Tomb and learned a unique and unrivalled way of maintaining her patience.

Nimoxing noticed that she held her swords in a state of idleness, as self-assured as he was; he would not tolerate this any longer. Without warning he roared out like a lion, and wielded his metal snake and drove swiftly towards her. Once he was on the offence, the left side of his body revealed a weak point. Xiao Longnu's sword trembled, Nimoxing's crutch violently rammed out and then he jumped back. He felt a slight pain in his shoulder; glancing down he was surprised to see the cloth on his left shoulder had a tiny hole pierced through it, and blood seeping out of it. If Xiao Longnu hadn't also been concentrating on defending against his metal snake, his left arm would've been detached from his body.

Nimoxing racing to the attack had no merit in it and instead he received a wound. He may be angry but now did not have the nerve to hastily advance again. The three men deployed to three separate positions and brandished their weapons. Xiao Longnu, standing in the middle, did not pay any attention to them. Yin Kexi's single "10,000 Yellow Sand Whip Technique" repeated four times, and then something abruptly popped up in his mind. He called: "Brother Nimo, Brother Xiaoxiang let's take half a step forward." Nimoxing and Xiaoxiang Zi weren't too sure of his intentions, but since he's the Western Region's greatest asset, with extensive knowledge and intelligence, they complied with his words and did move half a step. Yin Kexi at the same time stepped forward half a pace, and commanded: "Defending must be well-knit, it's crucial for the steps to be slow. Let's take another step." Nimoxing and Xiaoxiang Zi proceeded forward as requested.

The three weren't at all slack or sluggish in any way. After a while, they stepped out half a foot. At that point everyone could make out what was happening; the circle of the three

people surrounding Xiao Longnu was gradually shrinking, in the end they would force her into the centre. Although the three of them weren't confident about launching an assault, all of them continued to wield their weapons. They almost composed three impregnable fortresses progressively approaching the centre. The threatening defensive styles merged into a single mighty blitz, in which in its ferocity was incomparable. Everyone viewing this situation, especially the likes of the Mongolian soldiers, along with Zhao Zhijing and his fellow Taoists were secretly delighted. The other Taoists on the other hand were concerned for Xiao Longnu.

Xiao Longnu noticed them getting even closer and their weapons' movements still had no openings to exploit. Within a few moments, if she made an attack, their continued pressure forward would definitely crush her. So she attacked at once, her two swords in succession thrust out, with the sounds 'ding-ding' that were suddenly fast then suddenly slow. Every move met with the top of their weapons. She flashed out many sword thrusts persistently with every one of them blocked and returning back on her. The three of them moved up half a step once again. Xiao Longnu gradually felt alarmed and bewildered, as she backed away to the left side she tripped, and slightly staggered. Her sword techniques showed a great deal of weakness, if Xiaoxiang Zi and his crew had not been thinking of defending only, and had been confident enough to seize an opportunity, she would've been caught in an extremely deadly position.

The temple's floor was actually littered with many swords. The weapons belonged to the Quanzhen disciples and were abandoned on the floor after they were deprived from them earlier. A moment ago, Xiao Longnu's left foot trod on one of the sword handles that lay nearby, as a result her balance wasn't steady. Suddenly she recalled: "Others are competent enough to use two swords with two hands; since I've mastered the art of splitting the heart for two uses, then two

hands ought to wield four swords concurrently. I suppose it's improbable to attain a true degree of power using four swords, but perhaps it can be relied upon to confuse the enemy, and I can get a chance to escape." Almost immediately, her left hand that carried a single sword was swapped over to her right hand, she then stooped over and picked up two more swords. Both hands contained two swords now, and she began to wield her four swords at the same time.

Xiaoxiang Zi and others watched in disbelief and all thought: "This young girl's moves get stranger all the time. This truly is the first time I've ever seen someone use four swords together." But the three of them agreed on a plan to meet this contingency and settle with it. They weren't at all bothered about what sort of weird move or strange art she's going to use, they still thought only of defending and not attacking. They continued on pressing forward step by step.

Although Xiao Longnu's four swords used together was frightening when heard and observed, the power used with two swords is superior to using four swords. Normally she focused on a single sword during her training. The coordination of the Quanzhen Sword Technique and Jade Maiden Sword Technique in her right hand was flawless. Now the transition to using two swords with each hand was hardly effective, the movement's high level of proficiency was diminished. After several strokes, Xiaoxiang Zi and others realized her moves were somewhat slow. Each time she pushed out the swords, they had lost the immeasurable essence from before. Nimoxing's larynx created 'coo-coo' noises, and he waved his steel snake to signal his lunge forward. Yin Kexi urgently cried out: "What you're trying to do is useless, that's more like a plan for luring the foe." The warning jolted him and he thought "It's fortunate somebody else noticed really fast". Knowing how crafty the young girl was, once he attacked she would immediately respond with a

counterattack. Not only will their besieging formation break down instantly, his life is very likely to be taken away.

In reality Xiao Longnu was not luring her enemy on purpose, however Yin Kexi's information did make her think: "That dark short guy cannot keep himself calm, I must come up with a plan against him. He insists that I'm luring them into a trap; then I'll show him what luring is all about." Abruptly she raised her right hand and cast one sword vertically, she then followed up with a thrust using her right hand's sword, and her left hand cast a sword into the air. Xiaoxiang Zi and the rest were surprised, and unsure of what tricks she's playing, only seeing the two swords in midair had not yet descended. The other two swords that she carried were also tossed up into ceiling. This left her empty handed. Yin Kexi called out: "We must strictly defend with absolutely no intention to attack." He wasn't perceptive of Xiao Longnu's intentions, but he believed that providing they defend tightly and progressively press forward, then they'll surely have a chance of success. Their opponent may be barehanded, but they're not taking any chances to come out and attack.

Xiao Longnu bent over, without any hesitation both hands grabbed swords from the floor, and threw them one after another into midair. At the same time, they sunk down one by one. As she got a hold of them again, she threw them back up. Seeing those dozens of swords rise and fall, their cold lights glistening non-stop in the hall, it was very spectacular to watch. The Ancient Tomb Sect's martial arts foundation doesn't specialize in deep and profound inner energy, but rather relied on swift and rapid techniques to be victorious. That year when Xiao Longnu passed on martial arts to Yang Guo, he was required to block the escape of eighty sparrows with just his pair of hands. When this "Tight Encirclement Force" (Tian Luo Di Wang Shi) is used, then live sparrows could be impeded. Therefore the many swords flung and caught would be the same thing to her. Almost every

split second there was a weapon in her hands. Catching sight of Xiaoxiang Zi and his comrades stupefied looks, their minds were ruminating; is this young lady performing some sort of magic trick or circus juggling?

Without warning Xiao Longnu's left palm rose out and pushed up the handle of an idle sword. The sword traveled horizontally towards Yin Kexi at a fast pace. The tip of the sword ran into his golden dragon whip's glossy cover, and then it swiftly at unbelievable velocity deflected back but this time sprang towards Nimoxing. Nimoxing's metal snake was wielded with a sense of urgency, and repelled the sword back to hit Xiao Longnu. Right at this point, overhead there were two swords raining down, Xiao Longnu's two hands diverted the three swords and allocated them towards each of the three people.

In a flash, the clusters of swords weren't moving through the air, but rather hovering and fiercely swaying about amongst the three's weapons. The sword sent towards Nimoxing tilted and was vigorously shattered into two halves thanks to Nimoxing's metal snake. Xiao Longnu wore golden-threaded gloves and hit the tip of a sword, without a single wound being inflicted upon her. From her youth until now, she was very adept at the "Tight Encirclement Force" (Tian Luo Di Wang Shi); now, here in the hall, her advancing, retreating and avoiding skills were peerless under the heavens. Her eyes were sensitive and her moves fast, her spirit was crystal clear and the more she fought the faster she became. Her mind wasn't phased by any distractions, and didn't even think of whether she would win or lose in this fierce battle; or for that matter, who lives and who dies. At times smoothly seizing a sword and lunging out several moves, then quickly retreating back from the enemy. Previously with two swords, Xiaoxiang Zi and the others found it difficult to withstand her moves; now with so many swords arbitrarily tossed and thrust out they were more confused. With her as the nucleus,

the swords were flying out swiftly in all directions, how can it be possible for them to parry those attacks? Besides when the swords were knocked away by their weapons, they weren't in control as to where they headed or how powerful they were. Whether or not they would have to injure their companions, only heaven knew.

The act of Xiao Longnu throwing swords in the air was formerly used to confuse the enemy's eyes. But as the trend of events fluctuated, it exceeded her own expectations and conveniently became beneficial to her. In the midst of the weapons waving in the air, indistinctly could be heard of Yin Kexi's and Nimoxing's heavy breathing. Xiaoxiang Zi's cane, although wielded at a fast rate, seemed uneasy and weighed against his name "Xiao Xiang (Unrestrained)" and opposed its nature.

Suddenly Yin Kexi's right arm drooped downward and he cried out: "Crap!" As soon as three swords flew out, of all the places they could end up they eventually tangled up with his whip. His defense may have been tight but every one of these swords had been blocked by Xiaoxiang Zi's and Nimoxing's weapons. Three of them happened to arrive together and inexplicably ended up tangled in his whip. Yin Kexi used force and shook his whip to shed the three swords. But just as he was about to lift his whip, Xiao Longnu's sword flashed out and left Yin Kexi's wrist in severe pain, and he could not hold the whip any longer.

With the sound of 'chong-long', the golden dragon whip fell on the floor. Xiao Longnu's left palm struck out successively; seven or eight swords flew violently outwards and dispersed towards the three men. She moved both hands, catching a pair of swords; her body steadied and moved further out beyond Yin Kexi's reach. After Yin Kexi sustained the injury to his wrist, it left him deprived of a weapon. As a result his impregnable fortress like ring was eradicated in an instant.

Once his eyes caught a glimpse of her lightning quick twin swords, he hastily retreated out of the way. Xiao Longnu's lightness neigong was superior to any one of the three, raising her Qi, she directly surged to the back of the temple in pursuit of Zhao Zhijing.

Xiaoxiang Zi and the others weren't able to gather their weapons for a short while and had to wait until the many swords from above fell to the floor; until then they were unable to cease their defensive activity. Yin Kexi had a look of shame on his face and said: "Xiao Di's incompetence has lead to her escape!" They were supposed to work as business partners and without any sentiment but none there admired or respected the other. As they fought, each was thinking of ways to force the others to be convinced of their own qualities. But after experiencing such a soul-stirring ferocious battle, all three felt more like running away for their lives. In turn their hostility towards each other had been reduced substantially. Xiaoxiang Zi and Nimoxing both said: "We haven't blamed you Brother Yin..." Before they even finished their sentence, they suddenly heard the 'ding-dong' sounds of weapons clashing, faintly transmitted from the rear of the mountain.

Hearing the battle from the temple, Xiaoxiang Zi and others were terrified, but amongst the weapons crashing against each other outside was mixed the sound of Fawang's five wheels 'moaning'/whistling noise. Evidently Xiao Longnu and Fawang have started the action. All three of them thought: "With such a tough fighter available to act as the commanding general; if we fight by his side, we'll surely win." Yin Kexi retrieved his golden dragon whip, and bellowed: "After her comrades!" So they raced ahead to locate the racket. Xiaoxiang Zi raised his staff, and led a bunch of Mongolian soldiers to follow through. At this point everyone's archenemy was Xiao Longnu. They've never had any Quanzhen Taoists thoughts in their minds.

Yin Zhiping, Li Zhichang and others used this chance to untie each other's ropes right after the Mongolian soldiers left. One after another they collected their swords and followed outside.

Xiaoxiang Zi and others arrived near the rear of Chongyang Palace where Cave of the Jade Void was situated. They could only see the wheels whirling in action and the sword qi in horizontal and vertical motion. Jinlun Fawang's roar rumbled like the thunder. Xiao Longnu's clothes were white as snow. The two were separated at around 10 feet, enabling them to engage in a long distance battle. All five elements of metal: gold, silver, copper, iron and lead were melded into large wheels, were twirling in flight. The vibration created a humming disturbance in everyone's ears. Fawang's previous wheels were lost in a number of fierce battles and not recovered. After losing them he tried to supplement with replacements. The size and weight were more or less equivalents of his earlier ones, but unfortunately the melded decorative patterns were missing. All there was were his mantra. In the process of utilizing them, his proficiency was very high.

Yin Zhiping and Li Zhichang both saw the Cave of the Jade Void entrance blocked by a large rock. They weren't sure of their teacher's life and death situation. With deep anxiety, they hastened towards the cave entrance. With Da'erba's metal pestle and Huo Du's wielding of his steel fan, the groups of Taoists were repulsed in only several moves.

Wang Zhitan cried out: "Master...master, are you safe and sound in there?" Because of his apprehensive state, his voice carried a whimpering tone. Li Zhichang carefully thought: "On the basis of the five teachers' profound cultivation, how could they let people fight like this outside the cave without doing anything? Their practice must have reached a critical stage and cannot afford to divert their attention and come

out to deal with the foreign enemy. But with that call from Junior Wang, if they did happen to hear it, it will have thrown their minds into disorder." He hurriedly spoke out: "Junior Wang, do not call out anymore. The five teachers cannot be subjected to any form of disturbance." Wang Zhitan immediately realized his error, and helped a fallen Song Defang. He noticed his injuries weren't light and tried to think of a way to help him out.

Xiaoxiang Zi and others were onlookers to the battle between Fawang and Xiao Longnu. They understood that although he was defending more than he was attacking, he still managed to return one move. The five wheels powers were strangely fierce and did not allow Xiao Longnu to get an inch closer to him. This defensive style was way more efficient than that of the other three fighters. The three showed admiration topped with envy, all thought: "That monk being conferred as the Mongolian's No. 1 Guoshi (Protector) was no slander at all." The three fighters had thought of helping out Fawang as a team, but in this sort of situation, their selfishness got the better of them. They did not wish to aid him to a victory.

But little did they realize that although Jinlun Fawang's moves were fierce, in his heart he was actually complaining about his hardship repeatedly. Each of Xiao Longnu's sword thrusts were differentiated from each other but still coordinated into an ingenious and unsurpassed way of fighting. Her left sword aimed at his front while her right sword was selecting a surprise attack from the back at the same time. It was a message to him that he had neither a way to retreat nor a way for him to advance. Every path that she chose struck at several places with both her swords, warning him to pay attention to mistakes, as her moves are difficult to defend against. Had he not reached the stage in his life where his internal force and external force were at their peaks, his eyes sensitive and his moves fast, and with his many variations of hard and soft, his body would've been

hit by seventeen or eighteen sword strokes by now. All that was needed was a minor dip in his martial arts for that to happen. Actually, Xiao Longnu as one person delivering two types of sword techniques pales in comparison to her alliance with Yang Guo in terms of power, even though her moves were rapid. Not to mention that her real martial arts were a long way behind Fawang's. Even Xiaoxiang Zi and others were stronger than her. But then again, once she stepped forward, her moves were as fast as a bolt of lightning. No one had ever seen anything like it. This allowed her fears to escape from inside of her. Fawang suffered from the "Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden Swordplay" the moment it appeared again in front of his eyes; all he thought about was how to protect himself and how to slip away free from injury. Xiao Longnu gained the upper hand because of the way she beat him to the punch.

By the time they reached fifty or sixty moves, Fawang looked to be at risk, he withdrew his golden wheel to shield himself and wasn't confident enough to launch it again. After several more moves, this time the silver wheel was withdrawn to tighten his defense further. By the time, all five wheels were back with him, his fighting style was all-defensive just like Xiaoxiang Zi and others fought her before. The five wheels weight, size, colour and shape were all different from each other. Either it was sharp or more curved; they organized into five rings of light, which rolled all over the place around him.

Then suddenly one heard Xiao Longnu's delicate shout: "Let's do it!" This was followed by Fawang's low voiced roar, echoing repeatedly. They both leaped vertically, and their moves were picking up pace. Xiaoxiang Zi and others did not hear their shouts clearly, not knowing an adjustment had already taken place. If Jinlun Fawang used his wheel's fierce power to attack her head on, Xiao Longnu would struggle to withstand them. However since he was timid, he didn't show

the best of his qualities. Comparing his speed to Xiao Longnu, he's bound to be in a disadvantageous position.

Then suddenly, Nimoxing felt something on his face, as if a miniature hidden weapon had struck him. In a moment of shock he stroked the area of contact, but found no wound on his face; instead there was blood on his palm. His mind was dumbfounded for a while, but then he spotted a drop of blood flying towards Yin Kexi. Now he was well aware that one person was injured in the fierce battle. In a short while, Xiao Longnu's white garment was stained with over ten scattered splashes of blood. It was as if there were a few peach blossoms on a white silk fabric, which dazzled the eyes through its gay coloring. Nimoxing cheerfully spoke: "The demon girl has been injured!" Immediately after two flashes of the sword's reflection, Fawang quietly moaned. Xiaoxiang Zi coldly butted in: "No, it's the monk who got hurt!"

Xiaoxiang Zi's initial judgment was right, the blood from Fawang's injury sprayed over Xiao Longnu. He believed if Fawang was killed by her hands, then there's no way they can stop her. For that reason he called out: "Brother Yin, Brother Xiao, let's attack her together!" He wielded his metal snake and slowly pressed in behind Xiao Longnu. Xiaoxiang Zi and Yin Kexi also felt that they could not look on unconcerned, so they immediately split themselves left and right and approached them.

Fawang has been hit three times by her sword, but all were light injuries. But just when he's in grave danger, backup arrived. He felt a sense of relief, and saw Xiaoxiang Zi and the other two weren't at all opening up any sort of attack. They were rather using their weapons to protect themselves as they moved their positions to three sides steadily closing in on her. They knew that if the conflict is slightly prolonged, Xiao Longnu's hourglass will run out.

In front of the Cave of the Jade Void, the pine lined paths showcased a fierce battle between four Wulin stranger guests gathering round a silk clothed young girl. The group of Mongolian soldiers and Quanzhen Taoists were motionless with fear, their faces resembled dying embers. They've never encountered such a violent struggle before in their lives!

The ear-deafening bumping sound of 'peng' shook the earth. Gravel was tossed out and the air was full of mist and dust. The dozen big stone blocks collapsed to one side in front of Cave of the Jade Void. Five Taoists that were inside slowly stepped out, they were the five Quanzhen Masters Qiu Chuji, Liu Chuxuan and the rest.

Yin Zhiping, Li Zhichang and others were very happy and called out: "Master!" and rushed forward. Da'erba and Huo Du were shocked when they saw the explosive power that blew the entrance of the cave open; like it was blasted open with gunpowder. The two grabbed their weapons and rushed forward. Qiu Chuji and the other five masters moved aside a bit and then all of them raised their ten palms and pressed at the backs of those two. A firm press was delivered and the two were thrown four meters away.

Da'erba and Huo Du's martial arts were of the same level as Hao Datong, though they were not as powerful as Qiu Chuji or Wang Chuyi. But they could not be defeated within one stance by them either.

The Five Masters were in retreat contemplating in the YuXu Cave [Cave of the Jade Void] to create a way to counter the "Jade Maiden Sword" technique; they were pondering intensively day and night. They felt that the martial arts displayed by Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were the bane of the Quanzhen martial arts. It is impossible to surpass them with known stances; it was Qiu Chuji, who came up with an idea when he thought of the "Big Dipper Formation". He said, "We

cannot overcome them with stances and varieties, but if we combine our internal strength we can use power to make for variety."

Hence, the five intensively thought of a way to merge their internal energies to overcome an enemy; every stance would be generated by the merged power of the five of them. They know that there are no exceptional talents within the third and fourth generation; the only way to survive is to unite the large number of disciples. Within two months time, they finally created "The Seven Star Assembly". This technique was derived from the "Big Dipper Formation", although it is called "The Seven Star Assembly", it does not necessarily need seven persons to unite their internal strengths. Six, five, four or even three can perform this technique. When the Imperial Priest led the other warriors to seal the cave, the five masters were reaching the critical point of "The Seven Star Assembly" and could not be distracted. Even though they knew large numbers of foes have attacked, they had to ignore this for the time being. When they finally managed to merge their five internal energies perfectly, they blasted open the sealed cave. However, because of the urgent situation, this technique had only reached thirty or forty percent of its' level of attainment. Even so, Da'erba and Huo Du were unable to cope with it and the Five Masters were triumphant with one strike.

Qiu Chuji and others now turned around and were observing the battle between Xiao Longnu, the Imperial Priest and others. After observing for a few moments, they looked at each other and looked very sad and depressed. They thought: "In vain.....everything was in vain. We never thought that the martial arts of the Ancient Tomb School would be this magnificent. We can never defeat her in this lifetime."

The martial arts previously displayed by Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were the blueprints for their ponderings and contemplation. But the incredible, fantastic swordplay of Xiao Longnu was too awesome. They could not even see what those stances were, so how could they think of a way to counter it?

The Imperial Priest and the other Mongolian warriors had higher martial arts than the Five Masters of Quanzhen. It was practically impossible for the Quanzhen School to even produce someone like them now.

Qiu Chuji and others thought: "If our late Master were still alive he would surely be superior to them; our Martial Uncle Zhou is probably also one level higher than these four men in the field of martial arts. Yet, when facing the combined forces of these four fighters, chances are high that even he will suffer defeat."

The Five Masters were ashamed and depressed; they felt that Quanzhen was degrading with each generation. They could not carry on the legacy of their patriarch anymore. When faced with a great enemy it seems that the Quanzhen School has no leg to stand on anymore.

What they saw was that every move was brutal, every step made was critical. The more they watched the more worried they became and they weren't eager to inquire of their disciples the reasons for this unforeseen event taking place in front of them.

As the five people, Xiao Longnu and others, battled on, the circumstances were contrasting again. Every move Xiao Longnu made was an attack, whereas Fawang and others were still engaging in obstructing her every move. Counterattacks were few, but they were gradually closing in on her. Xiao Longnu's situation became even more disadvantageous. Several times when she tried to evacuate

the circle in order to slip away temporarily, her opponents' strict and concentrated defense was preventing it. Every move made brought her back well within the circle. She knew that with Jinlun Fawang as the driving force, it was useless to even try throwing her swords up in the air like before. Besides the two swords that she held, there weren't any other weapons available to her.

By herself in the main hall she injured Lu Qingdu, but by this point she had fought for close to two hours. Her physical strength was hanging on a thread, and the powerful enemies getting closer to her. Qiu Chuji and the others were lying in wait for her to one side. These five old Taoists were still very rare gems to find in the martial art world. Every corner was populated with enemies galore and she was only one person; she will definitely lose her life here at Chongyang Palace. Suddenly she remembered: "With me being brought to this predicament, what's the pity if I simply die here? But...but... at the brink of death, I dearly hope I can meet Guo'er at the same time. Where is he at this moment? He's bound to be getting intimate with Miss Guo, perhaps even already married to her. As a newly wed, why would he even think of a hopeless girl like me besieged from all sides? No it can't be, it can't be! Guo'er wouldn't be like that, even if he married Miss Guo, in no way would he forget about me. All I yearn for is to see him once again ..."

When she left Xiangyang and headed for the north, she'd made up her mind that she'll never meet Yang Guo ever again. But at this stage where she faced the final moments of life and death, she found it more and more difficult to stick to her vow. What was previously "Dividing Heart with Two Uses" is suddenly now "Heart Embraces Her Special One". Even though both her sword strike's activity was the same as before, her "Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden Manual" strength wasn't there. Fawang noticed a change in her sword style; he initially believed she intentionally showed weakness to

tempt them. But after several moves passed, it didn't seem so. So he immediately stepped further forward, his left hand's silver wheel guarded himself, whereas his right hand's golden wheel aimed for one of her swords to smash into.

Only hearing the sound of 'dong', Xiao Longnu's left hand's sword flew out of her hand and landed with a 'pak', it broke into two pieces. Fawang was just probing and it actually worked. This was far better than what he expected so without wasting any chances his right hand's golden wheel rammed out. This stunned Xiao Longnu and she quickly made an effort to suppress her perturbed mind. She brushed out three slashes. But since she was forced into using just a single sword, the martial arts difference between her and Fawang stretched further. Xiaoxiang Zi and his partners seeing the small advantages arising progressed forward with their own weapons.

Xiao Longnu revealing a grimacing smile and did not wish to continue the contest any longer. She caught a glimpse in the pine lined path a blooming rosebush nearby within thirty feet of her. The flowers were delicate and fragrant and seemed like they were about to fall. Suddenly she was reminded of the place where she was cut off by the rosebushes with Yang Guo while learning "Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden Manual". She thought: "Since I'll never see Guo'er again, then I'll think of him before I die." Her facial expression was gentle and soft as it is was absorbed into a moment of contentment.

Fawang and his teammates had surrounded her in all four directions; if they wanted to they could've finished her in one stroke. But suddenly they noticed a wave of abnormality highlighted on her face, appearing as though she had forgotten about defending herself from the enemy. All were astonished, and wondered whether she was up to those dirty old sorcery tricks again. Four different weapons wavered in

mid-air but didn't come down. But within that pause, Nimoxing's steel snake was the first to move forward.

Then all of a sudden beside him was the sound of wind souging; it appeared that someone had stretched out a sword to strike him. Nimoxing frantically got back his steel snake to obstruct the sword but hit nothing but empty air. Then he saw a person in motion, it was none other than Yin Zhiping who scrambled in front of Xiao Longnu. He was delivering his own sword to her. Xiao Longnu at this point seemed possessed as though nothing is within her sight, nor can she hear with her ear, and had already abandoned the matter of engaging in a hand-to-hand combat. Then she felt her left hand had been given a sword, and smoothly clung onto it.

The onlookers couldn't help but cry out in alarm after suddenly catching sight of Yin Zhiping entering the danger zone of the five top-notch fighters. For him, it was no different than if he were digging his own grave.

Fawang was acquainted with him, and did not wish to harm his life. So thereupon his left arm met his shoulder by force and pushed him away. His right hand's wheel swayed towards Xiao Longnu. Yin Zhiping was curious as to why she had no intentions to fight anymore. Desperately trying to think, his eyes understood that she'd be dead if this wheel grazed her. Without caring for his own safety he flung himself forward, and screamed: "Xiao Longnu, watch out!" Then used the back of his own body and obstinately blocked against Fawang's golden wheel.

Whenever Fawang's golden wheel swings out, its remarkable power alone could split rocks and slice mountains, what chance does Yin Zhiping have of withstanding that? So he immediately dove out of the way. After Xiao Longnu caught the sword given her by Yin Zhiping, she was as immovable as

before and she continued to firmly hold the sword erect whilst in a trance. Yin Zhiping flew out, and arrived on the sword's end, spearing through his chest. When Xiao Longnu came to her senses, a dawning realization swept across her mind and she was certain that he saved her life. Staring down at his back wounded by the wheel and his chest pierced by his own sword, and she knew both were mortal wounds. In a split second her all consuming hatred converted to compassion, and softly spoke: "Why did you do this?"

Yin Zhiping's life was near its last gasp; as soon as he heard the four words of 'Why did you do this?' couldn't hold back his wild joy. And said: "Long Guniang, I'm deeply...deeply sorry for what I've done to you; I could never amend with my selfless actions. Will...will you forgive me?"

Xiao Longnu stared blankly again, and recollected the time when she heard his conversation with Zhao Zhijing at the Guo's residence in Xiangyang. A thought just skimmed across her mind: "Guo'er had always been deeply affectionate with me, and even once swore that he would never be unfaithful to me. Then without notice he's made up his mind to marry Guo Guniang and abandoned me like nothing happened, and didn't give a seconds care about the after-effects. He must've learned that I was once raped by this filthy scoundrel." Her heart was innocent, even when she followed the tracks of the two Taoists Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing; this notion never came up in her mind. Once she was abruptly reminded by Yin Zhiping, her mind's compassion immediately spiraled back into hatred. Her fury has in fact tenfold, clenching her teeth; her right hand's sword immediately drew on his chest and pushed forward. However in all her life she had never taken somebody's life. Although her bosom was filled with grief and indignation, the sword that was to be thrust through his chest never happened to everyone's surprise.

Qiu Chuji observing to one side saw his beloved pupil die a violent death. He was distressed as though a dagger struck through his heart; the incident happened faster than anyone could imagine, and he failed to reach him in time to rescue him. Xiao Longnu's first sword strike can be said to have been caused by Fawang. But the second sword strike was intentional. He didn't have the slightest knowledge of the tortuous details. During these six months he's been without rest, for the most part thinking of how to negate Xiao Longnu's maneuvers. In the recent month apart from this he had nothing else to think about. Xiao Longnu had been established as his own Quanzhen sect's archenemy, but he definitely could not believe Yin Zhiping was willing to sacrifice his life to save her. His eyes seeing her sword strike out again he immediately leapt in front. With his left hand's five fingers whisking her wrist and his right palm aimed squarely for her face. Qiu Chuji's martial arts occupied first place amongst the Quanzhen Seven Masters. The circumstances forced him to make that move, and his palm's might was very forceful.

That jerk did manage to pull Xiao Longnu's wrist, and the sword was instantly out of her grasp. Without waiting for the sword to drop on the ground, she reached out her hand and regained possession of it. Then she followed up with a lunge forward across to Qiu Chuji's chest. During this moment, Yin Zhiping shrieked in pain as he sank down on the ground with blood gushing out of his wounds. Xiao Longnu's left sword pointed towards Qiu Chuji's lower abdomen. Now that both her swords have combined harmoniously, its power has rapidly amplified. Qiu Chuji's martial arts maybe profound, but within three strokes, he was in a helter-skelter state. Wang Chuyi noticing the situation wasn't right, dashed forward to lend a hand, pushing Fawang and others to one side.

Jinlun Fawang and his motley crew felt surprised when they saw Xiao Longnu fight against the Quanzhen Five Masters, but knew that this change of events was beneficial for them. He thought it would be a good idea to watch them commit fratricide. All of them gave each other a wink, and backed off several paces. They were waiting for a real victor to emerge between Xiao Longnu and the Quanzhen Five masters, and then they'd step in to tidy up the final phase of the chess game.

As the top fighters come to blows, every move was mortal; nobody dared to risk any room for error. That's why even when Qiu Chuji and his peers were aware that the situation was odd they knew it would be hard to solve easily. But since the battle had commenced, where could they find the spare time to consider all of this? The Quanzhen Five masters were unarmed, when confronting Xiao Longnu's marvelous and improper methods of swordplay, the single month spent on initiating a skill called "Seven Star Rally" did not even have any chance of being put to good use. In a moment, Hao Datong and Liu Chuxuan both were harmed by her swords, but both persisted and guarded every martial brother's safety. Then 'zung' sound, Sun Bu'Er was struck by a sword.

Other Quanzhen disciples seeing how the masters were failing in a dangerous situation couldn't help but cry out in fear. Li Zhichang called out: "Quickly deliver them a weapon!" At this point, the "Five Master's Palm" wind whizzed through the air, leaving the disciples unable to get near them. They could only throw the swords one by one over to them. Xiao Longnu raced ahead and brandished her sword to push away the incoming weapons. Every sword arriving near them was knocked away. The advantage Xiao Longnu had of having a sword longer than their human arms meant the Five Masters were given no chance to grab a weapon. Suddenly the noise of 'ding-dang' was heard, Xiao Longnu's left hand collected another sword thrown in the battle, and

abruptly lobbed it backwards. Wang Chuyi couldn't prepare himself in time; the corner of his left eye was slashed by an outsider's sword. Out of the Five Quanzhen Descendants, four were injured; a conclusion as to who triumphed could be reached.

Jinlun Fawang laughed ecstatically, and called out: "My Taoist friends please step aside, let me take care of this Demon Girl!" Finishing those words he intervened. Xiaoxiang Zi, Nimoxing and Yin Kexi jointly attacked her as they wielded their weapons. It had escalated into a phase where nine experts are besieging a single Xiao Longnu.

As soon as Fawang got involved, Quanzhen Five Masters were instantly released from Xiao Longnu's twin swords coercion. Five of them called out loudly, and stood shoulder to shoulder. Either it's the right palm or the left palm, five streams of huge energies amalgamated into one that generated the "Seven Star Rally" attack. It maybe only "Five Star Rally" right now, but its' power is out of the ordinary. She tilted her body to evade the attack; the noise of 'peng' was heard. The dust on the ground flew upwards, the attack left Nimoxing somersaulting in the air as he fell.

After both his legs were cut off, he had to rely on his crutches for support; his lower-body wasn't stable enough to sustain the blow. At least when he was in imminent danger he managed to slip away from the direct force of the blow. He may have toppled over, but instantly got back up unscathed. With a few bawls of 'wa-wa', he raised his steel snake aimed down at Liu Chuxuan's head. In front of the Cave of the Jade Void the sounds of calls reverberated in all directions adding to the confusion.

Xiao Longnu seeing Nimoxing turn on the Quanzhen Five Masters stroked her white sleeves, and wanted to pull out of the circle. Jinlun Fawang hurried over to hinder the attacks,

and said: "Brother Nimo, it's more important to deal with the Demon Girl." Nimoxing who's preoccupied with the fight did not pay attention to the calls of Fawang. Prodding outward with his steel snake, the assaults were laid upon the various Quanzhen Taoists. Xiao Longnu's swords quickly thrust out at Fawang several times. Fawang felt the unbelievable speed from the oncoming force; giving him a hard time just to parry them, and had to withdraw a few steps.

Suddenly, Xiao Longnu gasped loudly, both cheeks lost color. With two sounds of 'qiang-long', both swords from her hands fell on the ground. Staring in blank amazement at the pine lined path's rosebush, she called: "Guo'er is that really you?"

At this juncture, Fawang's golden wheel had sliced her head-on; Quanzhen Five Master's "Seven Star Rally" pummeled her in the back. The attack was supposed to keep Nimoxing at bay, but the Indian short man had already suffered the bitter taste of the pile driver. So he had no second thoughts of matching it and evaded to the left. The attack was alternatively expended upon Xiao Longnu's garment.

She looked bewitched, and the reaction to evade wasn't there. Her vest had endured a palm, her chest struck by the wheel. Even with such a fragile body weathering these two tremendous converging forces, her eyes were nevertheless still fixed upon the external influence of the rosebush. At that moment, her heart was agitated and she turned her thoughts to her beloved, it seemed as though those two forces had not harmed her a bit.

The spectators felt in awe of her gaze, and all involuntarily turned their heads to see what was so strange about that rosebush. They noticed a human shadow fly out round the side of the pine lined field and sneak into the no-man's land between Fawang and the Quanzhen Five Masters. That person, darting past everyone, grabbed hold of Xiao Longnu

with his left arm and had already leaped out of the ring. Without wasting a moment, sat beside the rosebush, and rested her against his chest. This person was of course Yang Guo!

Xiao Longnu's face lighted up, tears flowing from her eyes: "Guo'er, it's you. This isn't a dream?"

Yang Guo nodded, kissing her cheek, his voice soft: "Not a dream. Am I not holding you right now?"

But then he saw her clothes stained with blood spots, alarmed. He worriedly asked: "Are you seriously injured?"

Xiao Longnu earlier received two vicious attacks. Upon seeing Yang Guo, she didn't feel her injury. Only now she felt the searing pain. She placed her arm around Yang Guo's neck, saying: "I... I..." Her body hurt so much she couldn't get the words out.

Yang Guo couldn't bear to see her in pain, his voice broke: "Gu Gu I've come too late!"

Xiao Longnu said: "No, it's good that you've come. In this life, I thought I wouldn't be able to see you again."

Suddenly she felt cold as if her soul was leaving the body. She hung on to Yang Guo's arms yet her hold was slowly dropping. She said: "Guo'er, hold me."

Yang Guo's left arm slightly tightened, pulling her to his chest. He was overwhelmed by hundreds of feelings, his tears slowly falling down to Xiao Longnu's face.

Xiao Longnu said: "Hold me, use both...both hands!" Suddenly she saw his right sleeve empty. Strange, she cried out: "Your right arm?"

Yang Guo forced a smile, his voice cracked: "I've worried you. Don't worry about me right now, close your eyes quickly, don't use up your energy."

Xiao Longnu said: "No! Your right arm? How come it's gone... how come?" Even though her own life was hanging by thread, she didn't care the slightest about herself; she was determined to find out why Yang Guo was missing an arm. This was because in her heart, Yang Guo's well-being was 100 times, 1000 times more important than hers.

It had been like this since the time they were together at Gu Mu [the Ancient Tomb]. Only then she didn't know it was love, nor did Yang Guo. They only thought that their mutual concern for each other's well-being was right between the master and the disciple. Since there were only two of them living at Gu Mu, if one didn't care for the other, who else would they care for? Actually this was a feeling between a young man and woman; before they even knew it, they were in love with each other. One day they learned that one could not regard the other's life as important as one's own, let alone 100 times, 1000 times more important without being in love. Every couple who was in love could think like this. However, only these two people with truly deep feelings and innate passions who found each other and fell in love could treasure the other party more than they did themselves.

As far as Xiao Longnu was concerned, Yang Guo's one arm was much more important than her own life or death and thus she persisted on asking. She stretched her hand and gently stroked his sleeve, not daring to touch it too hard. But really, there was no arm under the sleeve.

Suddenly, she no longer felt the severe pain in her body. This was because her mind was occupied by Yang Guo's pain, making her forget her own suffering. She softly said: "Poor Guo'er. Has it been very long? You aren't in pain now?"

Yang Guo shook his head, replying: "It doesn't hurt anymore. As long as I get to see your face and never part with you again, what's so important about missing an arm? My left arm can still hold you, can't it?"

Xiao Longnu let out a soft smile, deciding that Yang Guo was right. She lay down in his embrace. Even though he had only his left arm, she was content. She was facing death just before seeing him again. Right now it was very good, really very good.

Jinlun Fawang, Xiaoxiang Zi, Yin Kexi, Quanzhen Five Masters, their numerous disciples, the numerous Mongolian soldiers ... nobody made a sound but looked dumbfounded at the young lovers. At a time like this, they all were thinking about fighting with them, yet nobody dared to start it. The world waited. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu no longer cared whether they lived or died. Having their love, what was so important about death?

Jinlun Fawang certainly was not afraid of the couple only astonished. He saw Xiao Longnu badly injured and Yang Guo having only one arm, and neither being able to withstand a fight again. However, the two people's affection for each other had an awe-inspiring and fearless effect, and was not something to be taken lightly.

Eventually, Xiao Longnu couldn't stay quiet, asking: "Your arm ... How did you lose your arm? Tell me quickly."

Yang Guo forced a bitter smile and said: "The arm was lost; naturally it got cut off by other people."

Xiao Longnu sadly looked at him. She hadn't thought that he wouldn't tell her who did it. That meant it didn't matter who. She again felt the rising pain in her chest. She knew her life wouldn't last much longer, lowering her voice: "Guo'er, I beg you one thing."

Yang Guo said: "Gu Gu, you've forgotten. At Gu Mu, I promised you, whatever you want me to do, I'll do it."

Xiao Longnu sighed quietly, saying: "That was a long, long time ago!"

"To me, forever is the same," replied Yang Guo.

Xiao Longnu smiled sadly and said: "I don't have long to live. You stay with me, until I die. Don't go accompany Guo.. Guo Fu Guniang [Miss Guo Fu]."

Yang Guo was sad yet angry, saying: "Gu Gu, of course I'll be with you. What does Guo Fu Guniang have to do with me? It was she who chopped off this arm of mine."

Xiao Longnu was alarmed, crying out: "What? It was her? Why was she so heartless?"

Is that... Is that why you don't like her?" Yang Guo said resentfully: "The two of us are very good together, why are you being suspicious? Except for one person, in my life I've never loved any girls. This Guo Fu Guniang, Hngg [expression of contempt]"

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That day Yang Guo and Guo Fu's quarrel escalated into a fight, Guo Fu's burning anger was hard to restrain. She grabbed hold of the 'Lady' sword and struck down at the top of his head. Yang Guo was poisoned and he hadn't fully recuperated yet, his four limbs had no energy to spare. Seeing the sword arrive, he was out of options and had to raise his right arm in front of his face. Guo Fu in furious vexation gave her all. The 'Lady' sword was as sharp as it gets and Yang Guo's right arm was silently cut off in a flash.

With that sword chopping down, Yang Guo's life changed. Yang Guo no doubt let out a fierce burst of anger; Guo Fu was

quivering with fear and knew she'd made a huge mistake that could never be made up. But after witnessing the blood well up like a fountain, she hadn't a clue as to what to do. A moment passed, suddenly the sound of 'wa' was released, she covered her face and wept whilst pushing open the door and rushing out. After a short period of nervous discomfort, Yang Guo promptly relaxed himself. And extended his left hand to seal his right shoulder's "Loyal Shoulder Point", he tore up a bed sheet and firmly tied up his shoulder to prevent the continuous flow of blood. Then he applied the Golden Wound Medicine to his wound, and thought: "I cannot stay here any longer, I must hurry and get out of the city." Slowly holding the wall he walked a few steps. Because he'd bled excessively, he almost fainted several times as his vision became more and more blurred.

At this moment, he heard the loud calls of Guo Jing: "Come on, come on, how is he? Has he stopped bleeding yet?" The sound of his speech was filled with anxiety. Yang Guo's mind at that time only encompassed these thoughts: "No way am I going to see Uncle Guo. I don't want to see him." So he took a deep breath, and sprinted out of the room.

He rushed outside the mansion's gates, pulled in a horse, mounted it and galloped to the city gate. The officers and men that supervised the city had seen him rescue Guo Jing at the top of the city wall once before, they had a great deal of respect for him. So they immediately opened the city gate for him and he dashed past on the horse.

During this period the Mongolian armed forces had decamped a hundred-odd Chinese miles (li) away. Yang Guo did not take the route of the main road. The horse was ridden through the desolated areas. He thought: "The time is up for the Passion Flower that's infected my body, but I'm still very much alive. Perhaps it's just like what the Indian Divine Monk said; after I sucked the poison of the "Soul Freezing Silver

Needles", the poison managed to counteract the other poison, which prolonged my life. But the poison has only subsided; sooner or later it's inevitable for it to break out again. With severe wounds, if I were to head off to Mount Zhongnan to look for GuGu, I definitely won't last very long. Could this be what fate has destined for me, and condemned me to die in such a strange place? He began to reminisce about his wretched orphaned life, other than those fond memories he had of being together with Xiao Longnu in Ancient Tomb; he rarely found any other specific moments of bliss. At this moment, the only close person he had has abandoned him and gone. Just when he's recovered – part of his body is disabled. Already half-dead, when his thoughts reached this point, he was hardly able to restrain his tears.

Yang Guo laid flat on the horse's back. In his wooziness, he didn't care where the horse would take him, as long as Guo Jing wouldn't be able to find him and he didn't bump into any of the Mongolian army. Soon, the horse came near the desolate valley where the Wu brothers had fought each other the night before.

It was dusk already. The long grasses in the valley were even taller than knee-highs. Silence swept the night. Yang Guo was quite sure that he was all alone now, so he lay down in the bushes and tried to get some sleep. By then he couldn't care less about his own safety, and didn't even bother to guard against poisonous snakes or wild animals. But the excruciating pain from his wound never stopped throughout the night. He could barely fall asleep.

The next morning when he opened his eyes and sat up, something suddenly caught his attention. Only inches from him lay two dead centipedes, bloodstains in their mouths, stiff as sticks, with red and black stripes all over their bodies, looking frightful even after they were dead. In shock, Yang Guo examined them more closely and found a big pool of

blood next to the centipedes. After a short ponder, he had it figured out. It turned out that the bleeding from his wound had created the pool of blood, and because of the strong toxin contained in his blood, the two poisonous centipedes had died.

A wry smile flashed across Yang Guo's lips as he murmured, "Who would have imagined that even poisonous centipedes couldn't stand my toxic blood." Anger, indignation, sorrow and bitterness swelled in his heart. He could no longer control his surging emotions. Raising his head high, he burst into mad laughter.

Three chirps came from the top of a peak and caught Yang Guo's attention. He looked up. It was the Divine Eagle, its head held high, standing on the very top of the peak. Even though it looked ferocious and hideous, there was something about it that made it look majestic and awe-inspiring.

Yang Guo was overjoyed as if he had just seen an old friend. "Brother Eagle, we have met again!" he shouted.

A long chirp echoed as the Divine Eagle darted down from the peak. It couldn't fly because of the heavy body and the two short wings, but it could run like a stallion. Within moments, it had arrived by Yang Guo. Having noticed that one of Yang Guo's arms was missing the eagle fixed its stare at Yang Guo.

"Brother Eagle, great misfortune has fallen upon me. That's why I've come to you for shelter," Yang Guo explained with a wry smile.

He couldn't tell whether the eagle understood him. It simply turned around and started walking. So he grabbed the reins of the horse and followed.

Only after several steps, the Divine Eagle suddenly turned its head back and smacked the belly of the horse with its left wing. Taking a couple of steps back, the horse neighed in pain and bucked up and down.

"I see," Yang Guo nodded. "Once I enter Brother Eagle's valley, there will be no need to leave again. Why bother keeping the horse?" Deep in his heart, he was already convinced that the eagle was really no less intelligent than a human being, so he let go of the reins and followed the Divine Eagle in big strides. Because of his severe wounds, he had to sit down to rest every little while, and the Divine Eagle would then hold its steps and wait for him.

After close to two hours of walking and with many rest stops along the way, the two of them arrived at the cave where the Demonic Swordsman, Dugu Seeking-A-Loss, had been buried.

Seeing the grave made out of rocks and stones, Yang Guo heaved a long sigh. All sorts of feelings welled up in his mind. "If this legendary master was able to roam the Martial World with no equal, his Kung Fu skills must have been extraordinary," Yang Guo thought to himself. "But he must have also been very eccentric and arrogant because of his unmatched talents and didn't get along with ordinary people. That was probably why he just passed away so quietly in such a desolate valley while no great stories or legends of him were told in the Martial World. And no sword art manuals or apprentices of his were left behind to pass down his invincible martial arts techniques. His life must have been very exciting and admirable, yet at the same time sad and gloomy. Even though the Divine Eagle is very intelligent, it is so unfortunate that it doesn't speak, otherwise it could have told a little about the Senior Master's life story."

He stared at the grave blankly, lost in thought. When he finally got hold of himself, the Divine Eagle had brought back

two wild rabbits from outside the cave. Yang Guo barbecued the rabbits and made a good meal out of them.

Days went by and the wounds started to heal gradually, and Yang Guo found himself on the path to recovery. Every time he thought of the Xiao Longnu, he would still feel pain from his chest, but it was far from the kind of unbearable pain he used to have. Yang Guo was the restless type. Having spent so many days in the desolate valley accompanied only by the Divine Eagle, he soon became very bored.

On this no particular day, the verdant hill at the back of the cave caught his attention. It was a beautiful day, so he decided to take on a random scenic walk. About half a mile into the walk, he found himself in front of a big cliff. The cliff towered straight into the sky almost like a huge screen. In the middle of the cliff, probably two hundred feet above the ground, a huge rock, about thirty or forty feet wide, stuck out from the cliff like a platform, and vaguely, he thought he could see words carved on the rock. Raising his head high, he stared up. Only after a long while was he able to tell what they were. Carved on the rock were two large characters: 'Sword Tomb'.

"Why would a sword have a tomb? Could Senior Master Dugu have somehow broken his favorite sword and decided to bury it here?" Yang Guo's curiosity started growing.

He walked next to the bottom of the cliff and looked around. The cliff wall was made out of bald rock. There wasn't even any grass or bush on the rock wall. There were no rock edges for grabbing or stepping on, which made him wonder how the Senior Master had been able to climb up the cliff.

He stared at the rock wall for a good while, and the more he stared at it, the bigger the urge to climb up he felt.

"He was also just a human being," he thought aloud. "How did he climb up so high? He's got to have some kind of tricks. If he had been able to climb up there using pure martial arts skills, then his skills had to be god like."

He stared at the rock wall again even more carefully. After a while he noticed something. On the rock wall, there were dozens of patches of moss, each patch several feet away from the other, going upwards in a straight line. An idea popped out. He leapt up and reached for the lowest patch of moss. Not to his surprise, a small hole emerged after he scrubbed out the dark soil. He figured that Dugu Seeking-A-Loss must have dug these holes with sharp blades. After so many years, dirt had accumulated in the holes and mosses had started to grow.

Having nothing else urgent to do, Yang Guo decided to check out this Sword Tomb. But having only one arm left certainly made climbing a more difficult task.

"If I can't climb up to the platform, then I can't. Who's going to laugh at me here?" he thought.

After tightening his waistband, he took a deep breath and leapt a few feet up, sticking his left foot in the first small hole. Then he leapt upward again, kicking his right foot toward the second patch of moss. The soft soil fell, and sure enough, there was another small hole on the rock wall just big enough for a foot.

His first attempt at climbing the cliff only lasted a little bit over one hundred feet before he ran out of breath, so he slid back down to the ground.

"I've already found over twenty stepping spots. The second attempt should be much easier," he told himself.

After some meditation at the bottom of the cliff, he gathered enough strength and finally climbed up to the rock platform. Although he only had one arm left, his Qing-Gong skills hadn't weakened a single bit. He couldn't help but feel some relief.

Next to the two large characters "Sword Tomb," there were two rows of words carved on the rock in smaller size:

"The Demonic Swordsman Dugu Seeking-A-Loss has become the invincible and unchallenged warrior under Heaven; he therefore buried his swords here. Alas, the heroes of the realm have laid down their arms, now my long sword is sharp as usual yet useless...the agony!"

A mixed feeling of shock and admiration welled up in Yang Guo's heart. He couldn't help but feel that this Senior Master's personality was very similar to his own. Both of them were lofty and defied the entire world. But he himself was certainly far from invincible and unchallenged. And now he only had one arm; even if he could survive this time, the chance of him becoming invincible would be very slim. He stared at the two rows of words for a while and then looked down. Rocks and stones formed a big pile in the shape of a tomb, its back facing the deep and broad valley. Putting aside the fact of how brilliant the Demonic Swordsman was, the sword tomb itself was impressive enough on its own. It was apparent that this Senior Master must have been outstanding in both his wits and his martial arts skills, and had high aspirations. He wished that he could have been born many years earlier so he'd have a chance to meet such a legendary master in person. Feeling thrilled, he shouted out loudly by the sword tomb in a long roar, and moments later, echoes rose in all directions. He suddenly remembered the kind of joy Huang Yaoshi had described to him: "To flick my robe on the zenith of the high peak and to wash my feet in the river thousands of miles long." At the current moment,

he could almost feel the same kind of lofty sentiments and aspirations. Although he really yearned to find out what kind of blade had been buried in the tomb, he felt afraid to offend the deceased master, so he gave up the thought and simply sat down, holding his knees in his arm, and breathed in against the wind. Soon, he felt as if his chest had been filled with pure energy and he could just ride the wind and glide in the air.

Several chirrups came from the bottom of the cliff. Yang Guo looked down and saw the Divine Eagle jumping its way up the cliff by hooking the small holes with its talons. Although the eagle had a heavy body, its leg and talon strength was simply amazing. Only moments later, the eagle had made its way up to the rock platform.

After taking a brief look around, the Divine Eagle nodded toward Yang Guo and chirped. The sounds of the chirps were quite different from the sound of its regular chirps.

"Brother Eagle, unfortunately I don't have the skills of Gongye Chang and can't understand anything you say. Otherwise you could have told me the entire life story of this Senior Master Dugu," Yang Guo said with a smile.

The Divine Eagle let out several more chirrups and then reached out with its talons. Grabbing onto some of the rocks on the sword tomb, it started moving them aside.

A thought suddenly popped into Yang Guo's head. "Senior Master Dugu had superior martial arts skills. Could he have left behind some kind of sword arts manual or manuscript?"

The Divine Eagle's talons kept moving and soon had moved away all the stones on top of the sword tomb, exposing three long swords lying side by side. Between the first sword and the second sword lay a long rock strip. The three long swords and the long rock strip lay neatly on a stone slab.

Yang Guo picked up the first sword on the left and saw two rows of small words carved on the slab stone underneath where the sword was placed.

"Fierce, aggressive and able to penetrate any obstacle, with it, I competed with the heroes of the Northern Plains during my teenage years."

Looking more carefully at the sword, he found it to be about four feet long. The blade flashed in the daylight. It was indeed a very sharp sword.

Laying the sword back in its original place, he then picked up the long rock strip. There were also two rows of small words underneath carved on the stone slab.

"Flexible Sword of the Purple Rose, I used it prior to the age of thirty. With it, I accidentally wounded a righteous man. A weapon of doom, I abandoned it in a deep valley."

"The sword is missing because he had abandoned it," Yang Guo thought. "I wonder how he ended up wounding a righteous man. Perhaps no one will ever get to know the story behind it."

After a short contemplation, he reached out to pick up the second sword. But only inches off the slab stone, the sword fell out of his grip and smacked back onto the slab stone. A loud clank echoed as sparks flashed everywhere. It gave Yang Guo a good shock.

Although the sword looked dark with nothing unusual, it turned out to be extremely heavy. The sword was only slightly longer than three feet, but it weighed at least one hundred and ten to one hundred and thirty pounds, several times heavier even than the heaviest saber or halberd used on the battlefield. He had not expected it to be this heavy when he picked it up. Caught by surprise, he had lost grip on

the sword. The second time he picked it up, knowing what to expect, he had a good grip on the sword. When prepared, something as heavy as one hundred and thirty pounds really wasn't hard for him at all. Taking a better look at the sword, he found both sides of the blade blunt, and the tip of the sword was more like a half circle.

"This sword is too heavy. How can someone wield a sword like this and still be able to control it well? Besides, the edges on both sides and the sword tip are all blunt. How strange!" he thought aloud.

Looking down on the stone slab underneath where the sword was, he also found two rows of small words.

"Heavy sword with blunt edges, simplicity brings superiority. Before I reached the age of forty, I used it to roam the entire world under Heaven."

Yang Guo murmured the words "heavy sword with blunt edges, simplicity brings superiority" repeatedly. He seemed to have comprehended part of the idea, but the idea was still very vague in his head. There were many styles of sword arts in the world, but regardless of style or school, each sword art always emphasized flexibility and speed. How should this heavy sword be used? He couldn't help imagining how the Senior Master had wielded the heavy sword and soon fell into a trance.

Only after a long while did Yang Guo lay the heavy sword down and reached out for the third sword. But this time something went wrong again. He had thought that this third sword must have been even heavier than the previous one, so when he reached out to pick up the sword, he made sure he had shifted enough strength to his left arm, but the sword turned out to be so light that he felt as if he had only picked up empty air. Casting a closer glance at it, he found a wooden sword in his hand. After the many years, part of the

sword body and the hilt were almost completely rotten. The words underneath said,

"After the age of forty, I no longer relied on weaponry. Bushes, trees, bamboo sticks or rocks, all could be my swords. From then on, I achieved great progress and slowly reached the realm of overcoming the sword without a sword."

Laying the wooden sword back to its original place respectfully, Yang Guo sighed in great admiration.

"The Senior Master's brilliant skills must have excelled way beyond my imagination," he murmured.

Thinking of the idea that there might be sword art manuals of some kind underneath the stone slab, he grabbed it and lifted it up. But there was nothing under except the hard surface of the rock platform. He couldn't help but feel slightly disappointed.

The Divine Eagle let out a loud chirp. Lowering its head, he picked the heavy sword up with his beak and then placed it in Yang Guo's hand. With another loud chirp, the eagle suddenly swung his left wing and smacked down towards Yang Guo's head. The swing was so fierce and powerful that Yang Guo could feel the strong wind generated by it long before the eagle's wing even came close to him. In a split second, Yang Guo felt as if he couldn't even breathe, and when he finally broke out from the brief shock, the Divine Eagle had held its wing still about one foot away from his head. Another two chirps came from the eagle.

"Brother Eagle, are you interested in checking out my Kung Fu skills?" Yang Guo grinned. "I've got nothing else to do. Fine, let's have some fun."

But it would be too hard to wield the over-one-hundred-pound heavy sword, so he put it down and picked up the first

sword. To his surprise, the Divine Eagle suddenly retracted its two wings and turned his head aside, paying no more attention to him, its face appeared covered with disdain.

Yang Guo immediately understood. "You want me to wield the heavy sword? But my Kung Fu skills are so ordinary. I am certain I would be no match for you, especially on top of this steep cliff, Brother Eagle. You've got to give me some leeway!" he said with a grin.

Picking the heavy sword back up, he gathered his inner energy around his lower stomach and shifted his strength to his left arm before thrusting the sword out slowly. The Divine Eagle didn't even turn around. Swinging its left wing backwards, the Divine Eagle attacked, its wing colliding with the heavy sword. Yang Guo felt a stream of vigorous force rushing toward him passing through the sword, so powerful that he almost ran out of breath. In a rush, he let out a roar and fought the force back with all his strength. The sword shook slightly between the two forces and suddenly all Yang Guo could see was complete darkness, and seconds later he fell unconscious.

Slowly, he regained consciousness, not knowing how much time had passed. Something incredibly bitter in his mouth immediately caught his attention, while, some kind of bitter juice kept dripping down his throat. He opened his eyes and saw the Divine Eagle placing a dark purple ball shaped thing into his mouth. This thing stunk like a rotten fish, but Yang Guo ate it anyway, thinking that since the Divine Eagle was extremely intelligent, this thing in its mouth had to be something good. With only a gentle bite, the skin of the ball shaped thing cracked open and immediately his mouth was filled with bitter juice.

The juice was extremely bitter and smelly and it tasted awful. Yang Guo really wanted to spit it all out, but he didn't want to

go against the Divine Eagle's good will and finally managed to swallow it. A few moments later, he tried to slightly control his inner energy flow, and to his surprise, he found his breathing smooth and fluent. He stood back up, and again, not only did he not feel tired or exhausted, but instead, he felt totally refreshed, no, it was even better than before.

Yang Guo was puzzled. Logically, when someone got knocked out with a strong blow, even if the person was lucky enough to not get injured seriously, he would at least feel soreness all over his body. Could that dark purple ball shaped thing be some kind of magical cure?

He bent over and picked the heavy sword up. It felt as if the sword had become slightly lighter than before. Right at that second, the Divine Eagle let out another loud chirp before striking with its wing again. This time Yang Guo dared not take on the blow directly and dodged to the side. The Divine Eagle took a step forward and struck again with both wings, fierce and powerful. Yang Guo knew that the eagle had no ill intentions toward him, but even though the eagle was extremely intelligent, it was still just an animal. With the kind of mighty power it possessed, when it attacked with its wings, it wouldn't really know when to stop or how to restrain its power. If he had gotten hit by the wing and fallen off the rock platform, it would surely kill him. Seeing the two wings striking toward him, he took two steps back in a hurry. By then, his left foot was already on the edge of the rock platform.

Who would have thought that the eagle would show no mercy? With a quick stretch, its sharp beak shot out toward Yang Guo's chest. Having no space to retreat back, Yang Guo had no choice but to block the attack with the sword. The peck landed squarely on the sword. A tremendous shock ran through Yang Guo's arm and he almost had to let go of the heavy sword. The Divine Eagle immediately followed with a

low sweep using its right wing and struck toward Yang Guo's ankles. Astonished, Yang Guo jumped up and leaped over the Divine Eagle's head, rushing toward the inside of the platform. In fear that the eagle would follow up its attacks, he waved the sword backward. A loud clank echoed as the sword collided with another peck from the eagle.

Having so narrowly escaped death, Yang Guo broke out in a cold sweat. "Brother Eagle," he shouted, "I am not Master Dugu!" Feeling achy and weak in the knees, he sat down. The Divine Eagle let out two low chirps and halted its attack.

Having blurted out the words "I am not Master Dugu" without thinking, Yang Guo suddenly thought of something. The eagle had been a long time companion of Senior Master Dugu. The way it had struck and moved about actually had matched loosely with martial arts principles. Perhaps when Senior Master Dugu sometimes became bored living in the desolate valley all by himself, he had treated the eagle as if it was a sparring partner of his. Senior Master Dugu had long ago passed away, along with all his superior martial arts techniques. But it might be possible to find some traces of this great Master's martial arts style and essence from the eagle. At that thought, he became pleased and stood up.

"Brother Eagle, watch out!" he shouted. "Here comes another sword move!" Pushing the heavy sword forward as fast as he could, he thrust it toward the Divine Eagle's chest.

The Divine Eagle blocked the sword with its left wing and then struck another heavy blow with its right wing. Its strength was simply too strong. Every time it swung its wings, the force it generated was on par with the kind of force generated by several first-class fighters hitting out with their palm strikes at the same time. Besides, the sword in Yang Guo's hand was simply too heavy for him to use any sword moves out of the "Quanzhen Sword Art" or "Jade

Maiden Sword Art". So for defense, all he could do was to dodge to the sides, and for offense, all he did was thrust the sword forward clumsily.

After a few moments into the fight, Yang Guo became tired and sat down to rest. As soon as he sat down, the Divine Eagle would step aside. The two of them played like this for well over two hours before they finally slid down from the platform and went back to the cave.

When Yang Guo woke up the next morning, the Divine Eagle had already placed three dark purple stinking balls by his side. After some careful examination, Yang Guo finally realized that these were animal gallbladders. He remembered that when he met the Divine Eagle the first time, it was feeding on poisonous snakes and also fought with a giant serpent. These must be snake gallbladders. He wondered if the gallbladder of a poisonous snake would also be venomous; but after he had eaten a gallbladder the day before, he had felt totally refreshed and rejuvenated, and had even more strength in him than before. Besides, there were already strong toxins from the Passion Flower and the "Souls Freezing Silver Needles" inside his body; he really couldn't care less. So in a few bites, he quickly swallowed the gallbladders, and then sat up to meditate. To his great surprise, many of the pressure points along his inner channels that he had a hard time sending inner energy flowing through before suddenly opened up, and the energy flow inside him became quite smooth and fluent. With great happiness, Yang Guo uttered a loud cry of joy. Usually, when someone was in the middle of cultivating his inner energy flow in a meditative state, it was critical for him to abstain from irrelevant thoughts, especially extreme joy or extreme grief. But this time his inner energy continued to flow smoothly around his body with no hitches or any blockage.

Jumping back onto his feet, Yang Guo picked up the heavy sword and stepped out of the cave for some more rounds of sword training. Having no more fear and worries, even though he still dodged a lot more than blocking, once in a while, he was actually able to organize some sneak attacks in between the fierce and powerful forces created by the Divine Eagle waving of its mighty wings.

This kind of training went on for several days, and gradually, he was able to wield the heavy sword with better control. It almost felt as if the heavy sword was no longer as heavy as the time he first wielded it. In the meantime, he also came to realize that all the sword arts he had learned before were too intricate with too many fancy techniques. He kept thinking about Dugu Seeking-A-Loss's words "heavy sword with blunt edges, simplicity brings superiority" on the slab stone. They had described a realm of sword art much more advanced compared to even the most ingenious sword techniques in the world. While sparring with the Divine Eagle, he concentrated on comprehending the movement of his sword, and what he started to realize was that the more ordinary a sword move is, the more difficult it was for an opponent to defend against it. For example, if he simply thrust out straight forward, as long as he had fierce and resourceful power to back it, the might of the thrust would be actually more powerful than the kind of sword arts like the "Jade Maiden Sword Art" that relied on fluctuating and unpredictable techniques. Even though he only had one arm, and after eating those snake gallbladders the Divine Eagle had brought to him, his arm had become much stronger than before.

One day while strolling about the valley, he discovered the bodies of three giant poisonous snakes on the ground. Their bellies had been ripped open and cuts from sharp talons left snake blood all over their bodies. By then, he was sure that the bitter things he had been eating were snake

gallbladders. The bodies of these poisonous snakes shined in a vaguely golden color. He had never seen any snakes like these before and had no idea what kind of snakes they were.

"I suppose the reason why the Divine Eagle has such tremendous strength is because it had eaten a lot of gallbladders of this strange species of snakes," he thought to himself.

After over months worth of sparring, with some hard effort, Yang Guo could actually take on the Divine Eagle's mighty force head to head now. Each of his thrusts had also become so powerful that they would whistle in the air. He couldn't help but feel very satisfied with himself. Since his skills in martial arts had advanced to a new level, the martial arts he learned before all seemed to be so insignificant. It was just like once one climbs to the top of Mount Tai, the whole world looked small and insignificant. But in another thought, he realized that without his previous foundation in martial arts training, he wouldn't have been able to advance to such a new level. After all, the Divine Eagle was just an animal that couldn't speak. It might be able to guide some, but it would never be able to explain things or provide advice. Besides, the Divine Eagle didn't really know any true martial arts skills. All it had was the god-given mighty strength plus the handful of moving and dodging techniques it had picked up while sparring with Dugu Seeking-A-Loss in the many years of companionship.

One morning, after Yang Guo got up, he found heavy rain pouring down from the dark cloud covered sky. "Brother Eagle, it's raining very hard. Are we still going to train today?" he asked the Divine Eagle. The eagle held Yang Guo's sleeve in its beak and pulled him toward the northeast. Then it let go of the sleeve and strode out. "Is there something strange again in the northeast?" Yang Guo

thought aloud. He grabbed the heavy sword and then followed in the rain.

A couple of miles into the journey, some vague but continuous rumbling sound came to Yang Guo's attention. And the further they walked, the louder the rumbling sound became. It was the sound of a waterfall.

"With such a pouring rain, I'd better watch out for mountain torrents," Yang Guo reminded himself.

After turning round a mountain gorge the sound of the waterfall suddenly became so much louder; it could almost deafen one's hearing. Between two peaks, the waterfall crashed down and poured into the creek below like a white dragon. With thunderous echoes, the swift currents rushed downward with mighty force. The many broken branches and rocks, carried by the currents, only took a split second to be flushed down the stream.

By then, the rain had become even heavier and Yang Guo had become soaking wet. A thin mist from the smashing waterfall surrounded everything, creating a magnificent view. But seeing the mighty force from the mountain torrent, Yang Guo couldn't help but feel a slight dread inside of him.

Holding Yang Guo's sleeve in its beak, the Divine Eagle dragged him toward the creek as if it wanted Yang Guo to jump in.

"Why do you want me to go down there? The stream is running very swiftly. I am afraid that I won't be able to hold myself steady," Yang Guo asked in surprise.

The Divine Eagle let go of Yang Guo's sleeve, and after a long and loud roar, it jumped into the creek and landed steadily on a huge rock in the middle of the creek. The eagle swung its left wing forward. A rock that had been carried down by

the rushing current was sent back up the stream by the swing. As soon as the rock came back down with the current again, it swung its wing once again, and sent the rock flying up the stream a second time. The eagle did the same thing five or six more times, and the rock never made it past the eagle. By the seventh time, the Divine Eagle gave it a good smack, which sent the rock flying out of the water and it landed on the bank. The Divine Eagle then leaped back onto the bank and stood next to Yang Guo.

Yang Guo understood. Demonic Swordsman Dugu Seeking-A-Loss must have come here often to train sword arts in the mountain torrent every time it rained. But he knew very well that he didn't yet possess such skills and strength. Feeling afraid, he hesitated.

Suddenly, the Divine Eagle extended its wing out and pushed Yang Guo on the arm. Since it was standing so close to Yang Guo, and the push caught Yang Guo by surprise, he lost his footing and fell into the stream.

In the rush, Yang Guo quickly used a technique called the "Thousand Pound Plummets" and landed on that huge rock the Divine Eagle had stood on. As soon as his feet entered the water, the great force from the swift current almost swept him off his feet. Yang Guo stumbled back and forth and had a hard time maintaining his balance.

"Senior Master Dugu is a human, I am also a human. If he could hold himself steady, why can't I?" Yang Guo thought to himself. So he took a deep breath and then concentrated all his attention on the effort to fight the force of the swift currents. That alone had exhausted all his strength. It was simply impossible for him to spare any strength to hit the rocks in the current with the heavy sword.

In the amount of time it took to burn a joss stick, Yang Guo had exhausted all his strength, so he jabbed his sword on the

rock, and with a push, leaped back on to the bank. Before he even had a moment to catch his breath, the Divine Eagle had already swung its wing toward him once again. Having been on his guard, he dodged the push swiftly. Quickly taking in a few deep breaths, he jumped back down into the creek himself, thinking, "This Eagle Brother is indeed a strict teacher and a forthcoming friend. He wouldn't cut me any slack in the training. He certainly has high expectations, and I, of course, want good improvement."

With this thought, he directed all his energy to the lower half of his body and held his footing steadily. As time went by, he gradually comprehended some techniques as to how to focus his energy and how to best utilize his strength. Even though the mountain torrent had grown larger and water had risen up to his waist, he was able to hold his own a little easier compared to the previous efforts. A few moments passed and by then water had risen up to his chest and soon up to his mouth.

"Even though I can hold my footing now, I don't think I'll just stand here and get drowned!" he thought. So he leapt back on to the bank.

Who had expected that the Divine Eagle had been waiting for this by the bank? Before his feet touched the ground, the eagle struck out with its wing. Yang Guo hurriedly blocked it using the heavy sword, but the striking force sent Yang Guo right back into the stream. With a splash, he fell back into the water.

When his feet touched the giant rock under the water, his entire body was under the surface. Water had filled his mouth as he was falling. Yang Guo knew that if he had spit the water out of his mouth, then his inner energy would shift upward, thus reducing the strength in his legs, so he held his breath and took a stable stance. A few moments later, he

pushed hard with his feet and leapt in the air. A stream of water darted out from his mouth. After taking a quick breath Yang Guo fell back down to the stream bottom. The turbulence and swift currents rumbled past above his head. He simply stayed still like a firm rock in midstream. Gradually his mind calmed down.

"Brother Eagle wanted me to stand in the middle of the mountain torrent, but if I don't hit the rocks in the current, for sure he would belittle me," Yang Guo thought.

He was a man of great pride and was always eager to excel. Even though the eagle was only an animal, he would still rather not lose face in front of it. So when he spotted the branches and rocks brought down by the current, he jabbed and stabbed and tried hard to push them back the way they had come from. In the water, the rocks had become lighter. The heavy sword also felt lighter and easier to control when he waved it around under water. He waved and swung and jabbed and thrust the sword until he was completely exhausted and begun to have a hard time holding his footing. Then he finally leapt back onto the bank.

He was quite afraid that the Divine Eagle would once again force him back into the stream. Without some rest, his tiring legs probably wouldn't be able to stand the forces from the mountain torrent. Not to his surprise, the Divine Eagle didn't want him back on the bank. As soon as it saw him leaping out of the water, the eagle struck out with its wing.

"Brother Eagle," Yang Guo shouted in complaint, "do you know you are killing me right now?"

He jumped back into the creek for a little while but simply could not stand the current any longer and had to leap back to the bank. Seeing the Divine Eagle's wing striking toward him, and not willing to sit down and give in, he had no other choices but to thrust the sword at the Divine Eagle. The two

of them soon exchanged three moves, and to his great surprise, the Divine Eagle was forced to take one step back.

"Excuse me!" Yang Guo shouted as he extended his arm and thrust forth the sword again. Sound of whistling echoed as the blade cut through thin air – this was something quite different from his past experience.

Seeing the tip of Yang Guo's sword approaching rapidly toward it, the Divine Eagle no longer dared to take it straight on and had to dodge aside.

Yang Guo knew that the half-day worth of training in the mountain torrents must have improved his strength tremendously. A mixed feeling of shock and joy swarmed in his heart. He couldn't help but question himself, "It should certainly take more than a couple of weeks to increase one's strength and power. How did I gain such great strength after wielding the sword underwater for a mere half-day?" He finally concluded that it had to be the gallbladders from the strange specie of snakes. Those gallbladders must have magical effects for increasing one's power and strength. That was why his strength and inner power had increased tremendously, and he had only noticed it when he released the strength accidentally in dangerous circumstances.

He sat by the creek and meditated for a while. His strength soon replenished. This time he jumped back into the creek for more training without being forced by the Divine Eagle. By the time he leapt back up the bank, the Divine Eagle was no longer waiting by the creek, leaving no clue as to where it had gone.

The rain had begun to slow down. Yang Guo figured that mountain torrents would have to be a lot smaller and weaker the next day. Since he didn't feel that tired, it would be better to train some more right now while the torrent still lasted. At that thought, he jumped back into the creek.

By the time he got back onto the bank the forth time, he found two snake gallbladders placed closed to the bank. Feeling utterly grateful for the Divine Eagle's caring, he ate them and then continued on with his training. Night came, and the mountain torrent had slowly become smaller and weaker.

That night he didn't sleep at all and kept on training in the creek. Gradually he began to realize many sword art principles such as piercing following the force, blocking against the force, slashing from the side, and chopping with a back swing. By then he finally understood: Wielding a sword this way, nothing would be strong enough to stand the force from the sword, and there would be no need for the sword to have a sharp blade. But without such a unique heavy sword, which was twenty or even thirty times heavier than a normal sword, this kind of sword art wouldn't have been effective. If it were just an ordinary blade, the force released from a gentle wrist snap would have shocked the blade into pieces.

The rain finally stopped, and the clear sky shone dimly in dark blue. Moonlight from a new moon illuminated the trees and the water in the creek, painting everything silver. Yang Guo watched the swift currents flushing down the steam path non-stop, his mind as clear as the sky. By then, he understood the principles behind the flow of currents and mastered the techniques with the heavy sword. He knew that he had learned the entire sword art of the heavy sword and there was no more to learn. Even if the Demonic Swordsman could have come back to life, all he could have taught would be the same. From now on as his inner energy grew, he would be able to use lighter swords, and eventually be able to wield a wooden sword like the heavy sword. But that could all be attributed to the advancement of his own abilities and skills. Regarding the sword art, this was as far as it would ever go.

Yang Guo paced back and forth along the bank. Raising his head high, he stared at the bright moon and soon was lost in thought. If Senior Master Dugu hadn't left him this heavy sword, or if there wasn't the Divine Eagle to guide him, and if he didn't eat those strange snakes' gallbladders and thus gain a tremendous amount of inner strength, then the entire world wouldn't have had the luxury of seeing this sword art once again. Dugu Seeking-A-Loss didn't have any help or references yet was able to comprehend such a pinnacle of sword arts all by himself. His cleverness must have been a hundred times better than mine.

Yang Guo's admiration and understanding of this past sword master kept growing as he imagined the Senior Master's demeanor in his mind. Suddenly, a thought popped into his head.

"If Gu Gu could see the great kung fu skills I possess now, she would be very happy for me for sure. Alas, where is she now? Is she also staring at the beautiful moon and thinking of me?" As soon as he thought of the Xiao Longnu, severe pain arose inside his chest.

"Even though I've comprehended the ultimate principles of the sword art," Yang Guo thought, "what good does it do if I stay here in the remote mountains all by myself? What if the poison from the Passion Flower suddenly activated tomorrow and killed me? Wouldn't this magnificent sword art get lost again for eternity?"

At this thought, aspirations arose again in his heart. "I shall follow Senior Master Dugu's footsteps and defeat all heroes under heaven with this sword art. Then I can die with no regrets," he spoke out this thought loudly.

Looking at what was left of his right arm, Yang Guo knitted his eyebrows into a straight line, and his hatred for Guo Fu,

the person who had mercilessly cut off his arm, swarmed his heart once more.

"This girl relied on the fact that her father is a legendary hero and her mother is the chief of the Beggar Clan. She has never respected me. When I was still a kid and lived in her home, she treated me with much disdain and disrespect. I was actually doing her a favor when I lied to the Wu brothers. If any one of the Wu brothers ended up dead because of her, wouldn't she be the one to blame for it? Humph! She took advantage of my severe illness and cut my arm off. If I don't settle the score with her one day, I am not a true man!"

He had always been one who took in kindness and grudges to his heart. He was without a forgiving heart. Before, right after his arm was cut off, he had no other choice but to hide in the remote valley and wait for the wound to heal. Now his wound had sealed and his Kung Fu skills had progressed dramatically, he could no longer hold in his urge for revenge. Having made up his mind, he immediately returned to the cave.

"Brother Eagle," he said to the Divine Eagle, "I'll never be able to repay the great kindness you've shown me. There are still several matters in the Martial World that I need to take care of. That's why I need to leave you temporarily. I'll be back here again once I've taken care of that business. If you don't mind, I need to borrow Senior Master Dugu's heavy sword for the trip."

He bowed down toward the Divine Eagle deeply and then knelt down in front of the stone grave of Dugu Seeking-A-Loss to salute before heading out of the valley. The Divine Eagle walked with him all the way to the entrance of the valley. After many affectionate hugs between the man and the eagle, Yang Guo bid his farewell and got on with his journey.

The big sword was indeed very heavy. If he tied it to his waistband, the waistband would break in no time. Yang Guo cut down three old vines from the bushes and made a rope out of them. Tying the heavy sword on his back, he ran using his Qing-Gong (lightness kung fu) and headed straight toward the city of Xiangyang.

He arrived outside the city as the time of day approached dawn. He understood that settling his business in broad daylight is not the wisest of decisions. Besides he's due one night's sleep, and his energy level will have plummeted. Uncle Guo and Aunt Guo were experts in the field of martial arts. At this point in time their health must be restored, a fierce struggle is guaranteed if by chance he was to confront the both of them. Therefore he ferreted out a thick patch of grass near a cemetery outside the city and slept there for many hours. Later he performed breathing exercises and inner strength cultivation; and gathered some wild fruit to serve as meal. He waited for the first watch of the night before he set foot below the city wall of Xiangyang.

Xiangyang's imposing wall was like a fortress. That day when Jinlun Fawang, Li Mochou and others leapt from the top of the city wall, they still required padding for their feet set up to prevent possible injuries. Right now, trying to climb from the wall base to the top is not going to be an easy task. Yang Guo had already thought about this and came up with a method during his time resting near the cemetery. Thinking: "I will never have enough time to learn Uncle Guo's kung fu of "Walking on Heaven's Staircase". What ever method Senior Dugu used to get up that cliff, I will capitalize on to climb up the wall of Xiangyang." He proceeded towards a secluded area near the east gate, luckily the troops that guarded near the top of the city wall made their inspection from afar, much to the convenience of Yang Guo. As he leapt up, he straightened out his heavy sword and spared no effort to drive it into the city wall. The heavy sword might be blunt,

but the ending force was unyieldingly strong. The city wall made use of extremely thick granite for its construction. Hearing the noise of 'peng', the wall was cracked open by the sword, which left a round niche. Yang Guo had never expected an effortless jab with the sword could have such power, and was pleasantly surprised about that. Next, whilst jumping up his left foot was placed in the cavity, he raised his sword and stabbed a hole into the wall just above his head. This time he didn't put a lot of power into it, just enough that he avoided alarming the garrison troops.

He helped himself up step by step until he was at the point where there're several zhangs left before he reaches the top. From here he displayed his "Gecko Crawling Wall Skill" to rise over the top of the wall and hid in a secret place. Inside the city wall were a series of stony steps that sloped down. Yang Guo waited until the troops walked away and sneaked down past them and dashed ahead straight to Guo's residence.

After taking nourishment from the snake gallbladders his inner energy rapidly increased. At the same time his body was more agile and his lightness kung fu was far greater than former days. But Guo Jing's martial arts were still very dangerous, there's a likely chance that the strength of his palms in the "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms" series is unchallengeable. In addition, there were the mysterious and diverse set of the "Dog Beating Techniques" used by Huang Rong. He only knew about 60% to 70% of it so he couldn't be too careless. As he reached the outside of Guo residence, he quietly leapt over the wall and entered.

Bypassing the garden, he promptly glanced at the house where he originally stayed. He went up to its windows, listened, and found that no one was in there. He gently pushed open the door and entered.

In the darkness he noticed the bed curtains and other furniture were no different than when he left. All that was missing was the bed's pillow. He lowered his body and sat on the edge of the bed, reminiscing privately about how his healthy right arm was lost forever within this bed. A stroke of sickness and anger latched onto his heart.

He was blessed with pretty and charming looks; by nature he was also somewhat lustful and cheerful. He may be passionately devoted to Xiao Longnu and thinks of her constantly, but there were many young girls who couldn't help but pour out their affectionate feelings whenever they met him. Girls like Cheng Ying, Lu Wushuang and Gongsun Lu'E either secretly had a crush on him or openly flirtatious in front of him. His hand lightly stroked the side of the bed, and he faced the inconsolable truth that he had become disabled. If he ever bumped into those love-stricken girls, he will no doubt be viewed as a ridiculous and pitiful soul in their eyes. His martial arts maybe fantastic, but he's still a mere freak that's shocking to behold. Thinking of all the ups and downs and viewing all the events that happened in his life, he couldn't help but quietly whisper: "It is only GuGu...it's GuGu alone whose feelings for me won't deteriorate. Even something as catastrophic as losing four limbs, it will be no different to her in the end."

Convinced now, he suddenly heard on his east side the muffled sounds of an argument between two people. He could make out the voices were in fact Guo Jing and Huang Rong. Yang Guo was curious about the cause and thereupon tiptoed to search for where it originated. He found the room where the Guo couple were situated and eavesdropped outside their window.

All that was heard was Huang Rong yelling with rage: "Those two have plainly carried Xiang'er away to Passionless Valley to exchange for the antidote. How could you still go on and

insist that Yang Guo is a good person? The child was just given birth two hours earlier and ended up in their hands. What chance does she have of surviving up to this point?" Those words dissolved into sobs.

Guo Jing said: "Guo'er is not that kind of person. Besides, time after time he's saved our lives. If Xiang'er's life could help him trade for his own life, then I'll gladly accept it." The sobs drowned out Huang Rong's words: "You could do that, but I won't..."

Then the sounds of a baby crying loudly interrupted the conversation in the room, the noise was loud and clear. Yang Guo wondered: "Did they somehow manage to snatch the baby girl back from the clutches of Li Mochou? Then why did she say: 'What chance does she have of surviving up to this point'?" Holding his breath he raised his head against the window sill and looked around. He saw a baby cuddled safely in Huang Rong's arms. It so happens that the baby was facing the window towards him, Yang Guo understood what he saw. He had a square-face with huge protruding ears, his skin was coarsely dark and covered with fine fuzz. He'd carried the female infant Guo Xiang for a long period of time, and remembered she was light skinned and petite with delicate features on her face. She's the complete opposite to this plump baby. Huang Rong's back faced the window, and quietly settled the baby down, and said: "It was nice when the siblings were together; you'd better find his sister and bring her back home." Yang Guo only now comprehended that, from her womb, she gave birth to twins. She first gave birth to the baby girl Guo Xiang, and afterwards there arrived a male child. The moment her son entered this world, Xiao Longnu had already carried her daughter away.

Guo Jing wandered slowly and aimlessly around the room then said: "Rong'er, you usually recognize main principles. As soon as it involves matters of our children you lose your

judgment. Can you not just put it to one side for the time being? At present the military affairs are in a state of urgency; how could I just leave Xiangyang and forget my responsibilities for an infant daughter?"

Huang Rong said: "I did say I wanted to look for her by myself, but you'll never permit me to leave. Are you actually going to let our child die for no reason?"

Guo Jing said: "You haven't recovered yet, how can you go?"

Huang Rong turned on him with rage: "A father not wanting his daughter? It's a hard lot being a mother, what do you expect me to do?"

Yang Guo had been together with them for many years on Peach Blossom Island, and remembered them as a loving couple. No major arguments were involved. Now that their faces grew red with anger, all words were equally matched. It seemed clear that they've quarreled over this matter on many occasions. Huang Rong cried and spoke at the same time, Guo Jing showed a taut face while randomly walked back and forth around the room.

After a while, Guo Jing said: "Even if she's brought back, you'll treat her in the same way as you did Fu'er, pampering her till she's spoiled, she may as well count for nothing!"

Huang Rong loudly exclaimed: "What have you got against our Fu'er? She loves our daughter dearly, she may have been bit too reckless, but the reasons were quite understandable. If it was me, and Yang Guo insisted on taking my daughter, I'd even chop off his left arm for good measure."

Guo Jing's face contorted with anger and he bellowed out: "Rong'er, what are you talking about?" Raising his hand he heavily slammed the top of the table, 'peng!', scraps of wood flew all over the place. A practically rock-solid red wooden

table was instantly broke in half by his strike. The baby boy was actually crying without knowing when to stop. When he heard the shout and the bang he automatically calmed down as a result of the fright he received.

Right at this moment, Yang Guo suddenly noticed a human silhouette below the window on the west side, also crouching down and quietly drawing back. Yang Guo thought: "So besides me, there's another eavesdropper outside the room, but who could it be?" So he tiptoed behind that person, and noticed that her figure was elegant, it's Guo Fu! The burning fury wasn't extinguished, Yang Guo thought: "Great! I've been looking for you!" Then behind him the light that radiated from inside was gone - the lamps were out.

Then he heard Huang Rong angrily speak: "Get out, stop frightening the baby!"

Yang Guo knew Guo Jing was about to come out, and his eyes would be able to locate Yang Guo very easily. So he shifted himself behind the rockery, and then quickly made his way outside Guo Fu's room. He launched himself high, and got himself on top of a tree, and concealed himself amongst the branches and leaves.

Within a moment, he saw Guo Fu return to her room. Then the voice of a woman said: "It's past the second period of night, sleep well Miss!" Guo Fu grunted: "I will sleep when I am actually asleep! Get out." The woman responded: "Very well." Then he saw a maidservant leave the area.

After quite a while, he saw Guo Fu faintly heave a long sigh of relief. Yang Guo thought: "What is that sigh meant for? You've taken away my arm from me; now it's your turn to lose an arm. But I'll take it easy on you because you're a woman, I won't harm you for the moment. If I did, it'll be just too easy. Such an act won't conform to the ideals of a real man." He paused in a moment of thought; he then came up with a

strategy: "Alright then, I'll call out loudly, to get Uncle Guo's attention. Once I've defeated him, I'll settle an old score with his daughter. As a man who's got a clear conscience, no one will ever jest at my actions." But then reconsidered again: "Uncle Guo's martial arts are extraordinary, am I really able to triumph over him? I don't think so! Will this mean I can't take my revenge?" Recalling the way he lost his arm, the blood boiled up inside of him and his heart hardened. Just when he's about to jump down from the tree, the sound of footsteps approached, and a person came striding his way.

He noticed the pace was stiff, the body was upright; it was none other than Guo Jing. He reached the outside of his daughter's room, and gently knocked on the door, saying: "Fu'er, are you asleep yet?"

Guo Fu arose and replied: "It's you father?" There was a hint of fear in her voice.

Yang Guo was surprised by this: "Is it possible that Uncle Guo knew I've arrived and so came to offer his daughter protection? Alright then! You'll be my first opponent! If I lose to you, my life is yours to take."

Guo Jing uttered an 'ng' sound. Guo Fu opened the door, raised her head and looked directly into her father's eyes, and immediately hung her head.

End Chapter 26.

Chapter 27 - Fighting Strength with Wisdom

Translated by BeeDreamer



Li Mochou was wary seeing Huang Rong meticulously wound thorn canes around the big trees surrounding Guo Xiang. Huang Rong's face was bearing a mocking smile so she got scared and shouted: "That's enough!"

Guo Jing walked through the door and went to sit in a chair in front of the bed, not saying a word. The two people have been tense and quiet for half the day. Finally, Guo Jing asked: "Where have you been all this time?"

Guo Fu said: "I...I've wounded Yang da ge (Big Brother Yang). I was afraid you'd punish me, so...so..."

Guo Jing said: "So you went out to avoid me for several days?" Guo Fu bit her lip, nodding. Guo Jing continued: "You were waiting for my anger to pass before coming back?"

Guo Fu nodded, suddenly throwing herself into his arms. She said: "Father, are you still mad at daughter?"

Guo Jing stroked her hair gently, lowering his voice: "I wasn't angry. I haven't been angry. I was only sad about you."

Guo Fu cried out: "Father!" and sobbed on his chest.

Guo Jing looked up and gazed out at the roof, not saying a word. He waited for her weeping to subside then said: "Yang Guo's grandfather Tie Xingong and your grandfather Xiao Tiangong were sworn brothers, so were his father and yours. You know that." Guo Fu made a low sound: "Hmm." Guo Jing then continued: "Even though this boy Yang Guo has always done things as he pleases, he has a heroic heart. He has so many times saved your father and mother's lives, and even yours. He is young in years but to our country and people, his contribution is not small. You should know that."

Guo Fu heard her father's tone getting more and more serious, even more afraid to continue. Guo Jing got up,

adding: "There is another matter you don't know about. Today I will tell you. Guo'er's father Yang Kang's conduct during those years wasn't very scrupulous. I was his sworn brother, yet I couldn't change him. He eventually died a tragic death at the Jiaying Wang Tie Qiang temple. Even though it wasn't your mother who took his life, his death was caused by her. Our Guo family and his Yang family heavily..."

Yang Guo [hidden outside] heard the words 'Died a tragic death at the Jiaying Wang Tie Qiang temple.' This was the first time he heard someone talking about his father's place of death. Filled with hatred in his heart, he was about to jump out ferociously but then Guo Jing continued: "I originally thought about betrothing you to him to make up for the hatred in my lifetime, who would have thought... who would have thought... alas!"

Guo Fu lifted her head, saying: "Father, he kidnapped my sister and said a lot of rubbish, slandering daughter. Father, even though his Yang family and ours go back a long way, that is not to say I have to let him bully me and not resist, does it?"

Guo Jing jumped up, shouting: "Apparently you cut off his arm, just how could he bully you? If he really wanted to, even if you had ten arms, he would have already cut them all off. Is that the sword handle?" Guo Fu, not daring to say anything more, took out the 'Lady' sword from under the pillow. Guo Jing reached out, his hand slightly shaking. The edge of the blade made a chilling sound. His voice trembled: "Fu'er, this must be done. Even though I'm being severe with you, in my heart I love you just the same as your mother." His voice turned gentle at the end of the speech.

Guo Fu let out a soft cry: "Daughter knows."

Guo Jing then said: "Good, stretch out your right arm. You cut off another's arm; I'll cut off yours just the same. Your father

has lived a righteous life and can't follow selfish instincts like shielding his own daughter."

Guo Fu knew perfectly well that this time for her father must be difficult, but she hadn't expected him to go as far as demanding her arm. Frightened, the color drained out of her face. She called out loudly: "Father!" Guo Jing paled, both eyes gazing at her.

Yang Guo hadn't expected Guo Jing to be this righteous. He considered the situation, heart beating fast, thinking: "Should I or should I not stop all this? Should I call out to spare Guo Guniang [Miss Guo]?" While still trying to make a decision, Guo Jing's long sword was raised. Then it cut down through the air, about to chop off Guo Fu's arm.

There suddenly came a shout. Someone jumped through the window in a swift movement. Even before the body arrived, a stick reached out, blocking Guo Jing's long sword. That person was of course Huang Rong.

She didn't say a word, sending out three successive hits, all Da Gou Bang Fa "Dog Beating Stick Technique" tricks. First, her beating stick technique was profound. Second, she caught Guo Jing by surprise, forcing him to move back two steps. Huang Rong called out: "Fu'er, why are you not running away?"

Guo Fu didn't have her mother's wits. Facing a crisis, she was scared frozen, unable to move. Huang Rong's left hand carried her baby while her right hand held the stick. She pushed her daughter's body out of the window straight onto the ground, crying out: "Quickly head back to Peach Blossom Island [Tao Hua Dao]. Ask Ke Gonggong [Grandpa Ke] to come plead with your father." At the same time, she wielded the bamboo stick, using Da Gou Bang Fa's "tangle" and "seal" tricks to block Guo Jing from following his daughter.

She called out: "Go quickly, Go quickly! Get the small red horse at the mansion's entrance."

From the beginning, Huang Rong had understood her husband's straight forward character, quite old-fashioned and extremely righteous. This time her daughter created a big disaster and then hid away for several days before coming home. In case her husband was still enraged, and had decided on a severe punishment, she had already arranged for someone to bring the red horse to the outside of the mansion's entrance, along with a saddle, clothes, and some silver coins. If he could be persuaded, she would let him beat their daughter to settle the matter. That would be extremely lucky. If not, Guo Fu had better be sent far away and, after a long while, come back to seek a reunion with her father.

The husband and wife quarreled. Moving towards his daughter's bedroom, Guo Jing's face was anguished, but in his heart he knew it was fortunate that his daughter's arm was saved. Huang Rong, relying on Wu Gong [martial arts] alone, wouldn't be able to stop her husband. But Guo Jing was disadvantaged by seeing his wife carrying the baby and was not able to get to Guo Fu before she rushed out into the garden outside the mansion's entrance.

Yang Guo was hiding in a tree, and watched what happened. While Guo Fu was coming out through the window, he only had to raise his sword to strike, how would she be able to get away? But then he thought about Guo Jing and Huang Rong's earth-shattering fight caused by him; he would be taking advantage of someone fleeing from danger, he just couldn't do it.

Then Huang Rong lashed out several repeated strikes, forcing Guo Jing to fall back a couple of steps. This time Guo Jing was leaning against the bed with nowhere to retreat. Huang Rong

suddenly called out "Take him" and tossed her baby to her husband. Guo Jing was alarmed, stretching his left hand to catch him. Huang Rong let down her bamboo staff, walking over to her husband. She pleaded: "Jing ge ge [Brother Jing], please spare Fu'er!"

Guo Jing shook his head, saying: "Rong'er, It's not that I don't love Fu'er. But she did this terrible thing. If I ignored it, how would it ever be settled? How would we apologize to Guo'er? Gods...his arm was cut off, with nobody to care for him. Whether he lives or he died by now we don't know. I...I really wouldn't mind cutting off my own arm..."

As Yang Guo heard Guo Jing's genuine words, he couldn't bear the heartache, his eyes turning red.

Huang Rong said: "Day after day we've searched for him and we haven't even seen his tracks. If something bad happened, there must have been a clue. Guo'er's Wu Gong [martial arts] are beginning to rival ours. Despite a serious injury, it wouldn't be a great obstacle."

Guo Jing said: "I hope so. I will go bring back Fu'er. We can't leave the matter like this."

Huang Rong smiled, saying: "She has already ridden the little red horse out of town. Why would you bother going after her?"

Guo Jing replied: "It's already past 3 AM; without Lu Da Ren's [Your Excellency Lu] or my command emblem, who would dare open the city gate at night?"

Huang Rong sighed, saying: "Good, I'll follow you then!" She reached out to take back her son Guo Polu.

Guo Jing handed the baby over, his face full of regret. He then said: "Rong'er, I'm so sorry. But after Fu'er has been

punished, even though handicapped, she will change as she won't have the advantage of..."

Huang Rong nodded: "That is so!" As her hands touched the baby swaddling cloth, they suddenly dropped down to Guo Jing's sides. She used her family's "Orchid Brushing Accupoints" (Lan Hua Fu Xue) skills to seal his pressure points, " Deep Pool Liquid Accupoint" (Yuan Ye Xue) on his left arm and "Capital Gate Accupoint" (Jing Men Xue) on his right arm at the same time. These two points were under Guo Jing's arms so that he couldn't use his Wu Gong [martial arts]. If she didn't use such a dirty tactic, how would she be able to seal his pressure points? When Huang Rong threw the baby to her husband, she had already planned all this. Tricked by his wife, Guo Jing collapsed painfully onto the bed, unable to move.

Huang Rong picked up the baby. She removed Guo Jing's shoes, socks, and outer clothing, placing him nicely in bed. She put a pillow under his head, making sure he could rest comfortably, and then took the command emblem from his waist. Guo Jing looked at her, his eyes wide open, yet had no way to resist. Huang Rong put the baby next to him, leaving the two gentlemen lying together, and then covered them both with a cotton blanket, saying: "Jing ge ge, today I am temporarily to blame. As soon as I've seen Fu'er out of city, I will come back to personally cook for you several dishes, kowtow to you three times, and admit my crime."

Having said that, Huang Rong lifted his body up, giving him a kiss on the cheek. Guo Jing had heard such a speech before, then realized that his wife, who was already a mother of three children, was being mischievous, and was not listening to her husband. He dumbfoundedly watched her pursing her lips and floating out of the door. Then he thought about his two sealed pressure points. She probably wouldn't come back to release him, so he quickly used his internal

energy to clear the pressure points. He wouldn't be able to catch up with his daughter anyhow. And for that matter, he didn't quite know whether to laugh or to cry.

Like most mothers Huang Rong was very concerned about her daughter's well-being since her daughter had to cover an arduous and dangerous journey (the more beautiful the daughter, the more hazardous the journey) to Peach Blossom Island (Tao Hua Dao). That's why, after leaving her husband and her baby, she went to her bedroom to fetch her ruan-wei-jia (Hedgehog protective suit), Peach Blossom Island's most treasured object, which she wrapped and clasped under her arm before chasing after her daughter, using her qing gong (lightness kung fu).

As she approached the Nan Men (Southgate) she watched from afar how Guo Fu on the red horse was bickering loudly with the garrison commander. The officer behaved very courteously but strictly. Without being shown a ling-pai (command emblem) he dared not open the city gate; a violation of this rule and he would be sentenced to death. Huang Rong thought: "This blockhead daughter of mine has been overprotected all her life; never being confronted with any problems, she doesn't try to solve difficulties using strategy, she can only shout angrily, which worsens the matter." Huang Rong hurriedly approached, held the ling-pai (which she had snatched from Guo Jing's waist belt) high and shouted: "This is the ling-pai of Honorable Lu! Please examine!"

As we know, the commanding general of Xiangyang was Lu Wende, although in practice it was Guo Jing who lead the city's defense; officially he was only a 'ke qing' (guest minister) who ordered on behalf of Lu.

Seeing Mrs. Guo with the ling-pai, the officer, smiling, immediately commanded the city gate to be opened. He

personally led his horse to Huang Rong and said: "Mrs. Guo, in case you need the horse of this junior officer, please take it".

"Fine, I'll borrow it." Huang Rong said leaping on the horse.

After leaving Xiangyang, mother and daughter rode side by side. Several times Huang Rong wanted to bid farewell and ride back to Xiangyang, but each time she postponed it. So she accompanied her daughter further and further.

At that time, the region encompassing hundreds of li north of Xiangyang was already occupied by the Mongolian soldiers. Most of the Chinese had moved out. But the region south of Xiangyang was still dense with people although they lived in fear.

After about twenty li, dawn was setting in, Huang Rong and her daughter arrived at a small town, its shops and restaurants beginning to open.

"Fu'er", the mother said, "Let's have some breakfast before I return to Xiangyang."

Guo Fu nodded with tears flowing down her cheeks. In her heart she already deeply regretted having cut off Yang Guo's arm in anger, causing her now to be caught in such a horrible mess.

They went into a restaurant and ordered cooked beef and rice cakes. In a short time the meal was served but because they were depressed they didn't have much of an appetite.

Huang Rong gave the wrapped up ruan-wei-jia with the advice to wear the protective vest later on when Guo Fu stayed in an inn. She gave advice and admonitions with Guo Fu listening and nodding several times, still weeping. Seeing her daughter in such a pitiful state Huang Rong actually felt

very reluctant and sorry to leave her, but her duty as wife and mother forced her to return to Xiangyang.

Suddenly, looking westwards she caught a glimpse of a basket filled with big red apples in a fruit shop. "Before I bid farewell to Fu'er I'll buy her some apples", she thought.

"Fu'er", she said rising, "You should force yourself to eat even though you don't have any appetite. In times of war you never know at what time you can get food again. Wait a moment; I'll buy you some fruit." She went out to approach the fruit shop.

After choosing ten scarlet apples, putting them in her bosom, Huang Rong groped in her pocket for money. Suddenly, a very loud woman's voice was heard: "Give me twenty catties of rice and one catty of salt. (1 catty = 1.1 pounds/ 500 grams) Put them all in this sack, please."

Huang Rong cast a glance. The person speaking was a Taoist priestess [dao gu] wearing a yellow robe, standing in front of the neighboring shop.

The Taoist priestess was holding a baby with her left hand and groping in her pocket for some money. The baby's clothes were made of lake green satin with a small dark red horse embroidery, an embroidery Huang Rong used to sew. As soon as she noticed that, her hand trembled and her heart pounded, the money in her hand fell into the basket. That baby must certainly be her own daughter Guo Xiang!

Huang Rong had never actually met Li Mochou before. But with one look she saw the fly whisk, the Taoist robe and she was able to deduct in an instant that this Taoist priestess was the infamous Scarlet Serpent Deity, Li Mochou.

At the time she gave birth to Guo Xiang, the Mongolian enemy was attacking and the situation was chaotic; she'd

had no chance to examine the baby's face. That's why, like being magnetized, she was drawn to look several times at the baby. Although the baby was still diminutive, it already showed signs of natural female beauty. With her cute features and ruddy complexion, she seemed well-fed and healthy looking. Huang Rong was pleasantly surprised, she almost shed tears. Polu, the baby she breast-fed herself, didn't look nearly that healthy.

After paying some silver, Li Mochou took the sack and left.

Huang Rong understood the urgency of the situation; without informing Guo Fu she gave chase. She thought: "This poisonous female is terribly cruel. Should I try to use brute force, she might harm Xiang'er."

After leaving the city, Li Mochou ran westwards. While following, Huang Rong thought: "Li Mochou is Guo'er's Martial Uncle. Although they don't have a good relationship, after Fu'er cut-off Guo'er's arm, we could say that the GuMu Pai (Ancient Tomb sect) and the Guo Family were bound in a feud. If this woman is going to meet Guo'er and Miss Long, I won't be a match against all three of them together. It's wiser to force a one-to-one fight with her now".

Li Mochou changed course to the South and entered the woods. Huang Rong accelerated, circling the woods and confronted the demoness. Seeing the sudden appearance of a beautiful woman, Li Mochou stopped short in surprise.

"If I'm not mistaken, I'm facing 'Chi-lian xian-zi' [Scarlet Serpent Deity] Taoist Elder Li", Huang Rong said with a smile. "I'm very pleased to meet you!"

Noticing the lithe and swift movements of the woman, the pale-yellow bamboo cane in her waist belt, Li Mochou at once put the sack down, she saluted smiling: "Junior has admired

Mrs. Guo's famous name for ages, I feel delighted to meet you now."

At that time in the martial realm, the most famous female martial experts were Huang Rong and Li Mochou. 'Qing-jing san-ren' [Sage of Tranquility] Sun Bu'Er was already famous before them but her wugong (martial arts) were inferior. Xiao Longnu was good enough wugong-wise but she was still too young and not experienced; she was barely known.

Both tigresses faced each other. One was the pampered daughter of the Eastern heretic Huang Yaoshi, wife of Da Xia (great hero) Guo Jing, Bang Zhu (clan chief) of Gai Bang (Beggar Clan), the other was the notorious cruel demoness armed with a fly whisk, "Soul Freezing Silver Needles" and "Five Poisons Divine Palm", three lethal skills which had caused much trembling and fear in the Jianghu realm.

It's the first time these two people have met, they scrutinized each other carefully, and each marveling about how unexpectedly beautiful the other was. But secretly each was on guard because surely each other's fame was based on real ability.

Mrs. Guo said with a smile: "Taoist Elder Li, junior has always revered you, don't be over polite".

Li Mochou answered: "Mrs. Guo is chief of the Beggar Clan and a leading personality in the martial realm, junior regrets not having met you much sooner."

After both sides exchanged the usual pleasantries, Huang Rong asked: "Elder Li, the baby you carry is very sweet and cute. Whose baby is it?" As she said that, Huang Rong had already thought of ways to get the baby back before they began the duel.

"This is very shaming for Gu Mu Pai" [Ancient Tomb Sect], the demoness answered. "Junior has not been able to guide my shi mei (younger apprentice sister) on the right path. This is Long shi mei's baby"

Huang Rong was surprised. She couldn't guess why Li Mochou was lying.

But the demoness wasn't deliberately lying. She did believe the baby was Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu's child. Because she was enraged that her shifu only taught the Jade Heart Manual to her shimei, she used this opportunity to mention her shimei's sins.

"I thought Miss Long a decent girl", Huang Rong said. "It's unbelievable such a thing has happened. Who's the father?"

"The father?" the demoness said. "Hmm...It's definitely shameful to mention! The father of this child is Yang Guo, my shimei's disciple." Huang Rong, who was usually good at faking, couldn't help reddening, and anger swelled up.

But she only changed colour briefly and instantly her expression returned to normal. She said: "That is deliberately creating trouble. But the baby is so cute. Elder Li, may I hug it?" She took an apple from her bosom and moved it to-and-fro in front of the baby. "Good child, your round face certainly resembles this apple."

After stealing Guo Xiang, Li Mochou hid herself in the woods and happily played everyday with the baby. Each morning she would milk the leopard to feed the baby. Li Mochou had committed abundant crimes, but basically she wasn't cruel at heart. Because of rejected love, she hated the world and its inhabitants, she turned cruel. Since meeting the cute and sweet Guo Xiang, her inborn mother instinct was awakened. Often in the deep of the night she would think about the baby. Deep in her heart she was uncertain that she would

agree, in case Xiao Longnu wanted to exchange the 'Jade Heart Manual' for the baby.

As Huang Rong wanted to hug the baby, like all mothers, who were always pleased if their babies were praised, she also was happy and was ready to give in.

Huang Rong's hands barely touched the baby's clothes, she couldn't hide the loving expression on her face, the radiant expression of a loving mother who had thought of her missing child day and night without knowing its fate and whereabouts. Now the child in question was at arms length. Li Mochou noticed the look and thought: "If she only wants to hug the baby, why that sudden change?" She hurriedly pulled back and leapt two zhangs backwards. She barely touched the ground as Huang Rong followed closing on her. Expecting an attack, Li Mochou heaved the sack at Huang Rong's face.

Huang Rong leapt to evade, causing the rice and salt to scatter on the ground. Li Mochou, whisk in the hand, said with a smile: "Mrs. Guo, do you intend to help Yang Guo get his child back?"

Huang Rong, reasoning the demoness to be suspicious already, now had decided to use force. She said smilingly: "I only want to hug that lovely child, you think too lowly of me."

Li Mochou said: "Guo Family's renowned name shook the martial realm, junior admired it greatly. Today I have seen the display of skills; the fame is really not an empty one. But junior has to deal with another matter and must leave." She was afraid that Guo Jing would appear, she turned and walked away.

Huang Rong leaped up and in midair drew her bamboo stick. The original "Dog beating Stick" was passed on to Lu Youjiao, the stick she had now was of the same length and weight but

of a light-yellow colour. In midair she aimed at an Accupoint on Li Mochou's back. Li Mochou angrily thought: "We don't have any enmity for each other. Today we've met for the first time, I've talked with due respect to you, why do you attack me without any reason at all?" She checked the stick with her whisk. Huang Rong attacked continuously with six or seven moves, forcing Li Mochou to the defensive. Li Mochou's wugong was actually slightly below Huang Rong's and further, she carried a baby, a few stances more and she was in great difficulty.

After several moves Li Mochou saw that Huang Rong didn't aim her attack at the baby, she thought: "Each time I fight carrying this baby seems to be an advantage." She said smilingly: "Mrs. Guo, the world is vast and there will be other occasions, why do you choose here and now to try my skills? Should you make a mistake, you will hurt this lovely child."

Huang Rong thought: "Doesn't she really know this baby is mine, or is she just pretending? I'll try her first." She said: "Thinking of this child, my first ten moves were not seriously executed, if you still want to carry that baby it's not my fault should she get hurt." With her stick she aimed at Li Mochou's right leg, the latter used her whisk to parry, before both weapons clashed Huang Rong already changed direction to the left chest. The attack threatened both Li Mochou and the baby. If it was successful, not only would Li Mochou be injured but the baby would lose its' life.

Using the stick, Huang Rong had natural control, the stick's end neared Guo Xiang's clothes and it seemed the baby couldn't be saved. But in reality Huang Rong had perfect control on the force and reach of the stick. Li Mochou, who was very worried, surely didn't know that, she hurriedly evaded to the right, unavoidably revealing a flaw, the stick touched her left shin. Nearly tripping she took two steps before regaining her balance again. She wielded the whisk in

front of her body for protection, turning around she said angrily: "Mrs. Guo, you are so famous; how can you be that cruel to a baby?"

Huang Rong, who saw Li Mochou wasn't pretending, felt great happiness and mused: "You want to protect my daughter; I'll frighten you a bit." With a faint smile she said: "Elder Li said this child is illegitimate, why should you want to keep it alive?" With that she launched a chain of attacks all aimed at Guo Xiang. Li Mochou hopped to the left and right frantically, holding the baby tightly. The baby, who now cried loudly, was feeling uncomfortable due to the jolting movements. Huang Rong said silently: "My clever child, don't be startled. To rescue you, mom is forced to do this." Although in her heart she felt pity, she launched several swift and lethal attacks in the direction of Guo Xiang. Li Mochou anxiously drew back several steps lifting the whisk in front of Guo Xiang to protect her and called out: "Mrs. Guo, what do you really want?"

Huang Rong said smilingly: "In this era, the martial realm only acknowledges Elder Li and junior as the outstanding female fighters. This time we met by chance, why not use this occasion to arrange a little try out between us?"

The attacks on Guo Xiang had angered Li Mochou; the challenge had angered her even more. She thought: "If your husband was here I will probably be afraid, but we are both females, do you think I fear you?" Immediately she humphed, saying: "Mrs. Guo intends to grant me a lesson; that is what junior always has hoped for."

Huang Rong: "If you carry a baby during the duel and I win, it won't satisfy either of us. Put it aside, and then we can move more freely."

Li Mochou thought: "Guo husband and wife are renowned for their righteousness, but judging her ferocity towards a mere

baby makes me believe that fame is much too exaggerated." She looked in all directions and saw in the East several big trees with a strip of thick grass beneath. She put the baby on the grass, patted it to sooth it, turned and invited Huang Rong to begin.

After ten stances Huang Rong realized that their wugong was about the same level. If she tried now to snatch Guo Xiang away and fight the demoness, then it was probable that Guo Xiang might get hurt. If she killed the demoness first, she wouldn't have any trouble at all. This female had committed all sorts of crimes, thinking of that, Huang Rong developed a killing intent. Li Mochou thought that her adversary would stop at nothing, seeing Huang Rong often glancing at the baby, she was worried that Huang Rong would carry out a sudden, fake attack and hurt the baby instead. That's why she positioned herself between Huang Rong and the baby.

During the fight Huang Rong had thought up seven or eight stratagems, each of them would dispatch Li Mochou but unavoidably also endangered Guo Xiang. She pondered: "Looks like this demoness truly cherishes Guo Xiang. If the baby is in her hands and I couldn't snatch it for a while, it wouldn't matter much, whereas if I take risks the baby could be endangered." Suddenly she had an idea: "Elder Li, our wugong doesn't differ much, a decision would take some time. If meanwhile a wild animal appears and devours the child, wouldn't it divert our concentration? The best way is to take that little bastard's life now, and then we could fight at ease." After saying that, she bent, picked up a pebble, and with her middle finger flicked it, whizzing in the direction of Guo Xiang.

She had used the unique Huang family skill "Divine Flicking Finger" (dan zhi shen tong). Li Mochou, who knew that lethal skill, hurriedly fended off the pebble with her whisk and

shouted: "What has this child done to you? Why do you repeatedly try to kill her?"

Huang Rong secretly thought this was funny, she actually flicked with a retracting force, as soon as the pebble was in the vicinity of Guo Xiang, it would fly back. Huang Rong smiled and said: "Elder Li, you certainly defend that child with all your might. People who don't know would certainly think it is...it is your..."

Li Mochou: "... is my child?" After saying that, she blushed.

Huang Rong said smilingly: "You are single, so naturally you can't have a child. I mean people would think it is your younger sister." Li Mochou humphed, thinking nothing of it. She didn't realize that the competitive Huang Rong also wouldn't want to lose even in a battle of insults. If Guo Xiang was Li Mochou's sister, then Guo Jing and Huang Rong would be Li Mochou's parents. That's Huang Rong's hidden revenge for Li Mochou's recent remark that Yang Guo was the father of Guo Xiang.

Li Mochou: "Let's start again!"

Huang Rong: "You are thinking about the child and can't concentrate, even if I win, it wouldn't be a fair win. I'll surround the child with thorn canes, so wild beasts can't come near her, and then we can both concentrate on the fight." Saying that, she took a golden knife from her waist to cut canes and wound them around the big trees surrounding Guo Xiang.

At first the demoness was wary but she observed that Huang Rong did it very meticulously and she thought: "In the Jianghu realm Mrs. Guo is praised as multi talented, she really lives up to that reputation." But seeing Huang Rong's face bearing a mocking smile she got scared again and shouted: "That's enough!"

Huang Rong: "If you say it's enough, that's all right with me. Elder Li, you've met my father, haven't you?"

Li Mochou: "Yes, I have."

Huang Rong: "Yang Guo told me you've composed a poem of four lines to ridicule my father, haven't you? It sounds like this:

'Peach Blossom Island's master,
Has numerous disciples,
Five against one,
The laughing stock of the Jianghu realm!'"

Li Mochou thought: "Stupid of me not to think about that. Now I understand that she hampers me because of those four lines." She retorted coldly: "That day it was five against one, wasn't it?"

Huang Rong: "Today it's one against one; we'll see who will be the laughing stock of the Jianghu realm."

Li Mochou: "Stop being arrogant! I've seen a lot of Peach Blossom Island's wugong (martial arts), it's mediocre at the most."

Huang Rong sneered: "Not to mention the Island's wugong, I think you can't even cope with the Island's non-wugong. If you don't believe me, just try to get that child back."

Li Mochou was startled: "Has she injured the child?" Hurriedly she jumped in the cane circle following its turns, hearing the baby cry she felt relieved, but after several turns she ended up out of the circle again. She was puzzled, trying to leap in again she was not careful enough, a thorn had ripped her Taoist robe. She didn't dare to be careless again, looking where to land her feet she suddenly saw Huang Rong standing in the middle of the circle bending down to hug the

child. She was shocked and immediately shouted: "Put the child down!" She deliberately tried and tried to bridge the circle to get in but ended on the outside again. The seven or eight big trees occupying an area of about several zhangs formed a maze. She saw Huang Rong putting the child down and dexterously leaping to the East and the West to leave the circle easily.

The 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' now remembered the fight against Yang Guo and Chen Ying with them using piled earth before the hut, preventing her from attacking them directly. Now Huang Rong probably also had used the "Eight Diagrams of the Nine Palaces Divine Method" (Jiu gong ba gua shen shu) of Tao Hua Island in arranging the cane circle. Li Mochou decided to beat the enemy first and rescue the child later. She leapt several zhangs away and was ready to fight again. When Huang Rong saw her adversary confused she secretly rejoiced but seeing Li Mochou's firm decision she also felt a kind of admiration. After successfully securing her daughter in a safe place, she attacked Li Mochou with the stance "To Push the Dog to Lower its Head" (an gou di tou). Li Mochou entangled the stick with the whisk and further attacked Huang Rong. Both had swiftly exchanged several stances.

Li Mochou changed her fighting tactics but her adversary's bamboo stick technique was really incomparable, with much effort she managed to resist about ten stances, this was already a rare feat in the martial realm. The bamboo stick was a light weapon and could by no means kill like a sharp weapon, but it managed to threaten all main 36 accupoints on the body. Li Mochou again managed to resist several stances; there was sweat on her forehead. Li Mochou put the whisk in front of her body to protect it then leapt backwards, saying: "Mrs. Guo, your Bamboo Stick Technique (zhu bang fa) is really superb, junior admits defeat. But junior has a question which needs an explanation."

Huang Rong: "Can't imagine what matter I'm able to explain to you!"

Li Mochou: "The bamboo stick technique is a unique skill of the Nine Fingered Divine Beggar, whereas Tao Hua Island's wugong is famous in the realm, why doesn't Mrs. Guo use your own family's wugong?"

Huang Rong thought: "This person is tricky; she isn't able to win against my stick and tries to provoke me." She said with a smile: "If Elder knows this stick method is Nine Fingered Divine Beggar's, then you also know what it's called?" Li Mochou humphed but didn't reply. Huang Rong sneered: "It's called 'if you meet a dog, flog it' stick method."

Li Mochou resigned. She didn't succeed in luring Huang Rong to use her palm instead of the stick; the enemy even mocked her, using her glib tongue. Inserting the whisk on her waist she said: "Beggars use to chant the lian-hua (begging) chant, their Bang Zhu is no exception." She strode to the nearest tree and sat on a branch.

That Li Mochou admitted defeat was what Huang Rong wanted. But the demoness didn't leave and Huang Rong could guess her intention very well, she would immediately attack as soon as Huang Rong tried to get the baby. With Huang Rong holding the baby and hampered by it, their skills would even out. So, with the baby practically in her hands, she couldn't bring it safely home without killing or injuring the demoness.

Suddenly Huang Rong moved, approaching Li Mochou with three steps to the left and four steps to the right. Those steps seemed common, but they bore the intricacies of the "Eight Diagrams" (Ba-gua), in whatever direction Li Mochou would try to flee, Huang Rong could still have blocked her path, that's the purpose of the movement. Huang Rong already threatened her left elbow with the stick.

Li Mochou parried with her palm and shouted: "After Chen Xuanfeng and Mei Chaofeng died, Huang Yaoshi truly has no disciples who have inherited his skills." What Li Mochou said not only ridiculed Huang Rong for using the 'foreign' "Dog Beating Stick" method but also to try to humiliate her father as well. Actually Huang Rong had inherited the Huang family's skill "Jade Flute Sword Method" (Yu xiao jian fa) with profound mastery, but using a sword and not a stick, she was unsure of winning against such a formidable adversary. She answered faintly smiling: "It is true that my father had unworthy disciples, they certainly can't be compared to pure and chaste apprentice sisters like Elder Li and Miss Long."

The demoness went sick with rage. Waving her sleeve, two "Soul Freezing Silver Needles" were shot, aiming at Huang Rong's lower abdomen. Although she was incomparably cruel and could kill without batting an eye, she was still a virgin. Hearing Huang Rong put her on par with her 'dishonored' apprentice sister, made her use her lethal poisoned needles.

Huang Rong, staying very close, never had a chance to dodge them. But having perfect command of the Dog Beating Stick method, she still could hurriedly fend them off with the stick. The needles flew about two inches past her face; she could faintly sniff their poisonous smell. She remembered her eagle whose foot was hit by such a needle and it took about six or seven months to cure. Meanwhile another pair of needles shot out.

Huang Rong hastily leapt up and ran towards the East, two needles whizzing near her ear. She thought: "This place is too near to Xiang'er; if she got struck by a random flying needle, it would be lethal for her." She rushed further, leaving the forest.

Li Mochou chased joyfully, she felt that with the exception of 'Da gau bang fa', her other skills were superior to that of Mrs.

Guo. She shouted: "Victory or defeat hasn't been decided, why do you run away?" Huang Rong stopped, faintly smiling.

Li Mochou said reproachingly: "Mrs. Guo, do you need the stick to keep my needles away?"

Huang Rong knew that as long as she used the stick, Li Mochou wouldn't accept her defeat. She inserted the stick on her waist and chuckled: "Li dao-zhang, I've long heard about your incomparable "Five Poisons Divine Palm" (Wu du shen zhang) and how it has killed numerous people, junior wants to try out that ominous palm."

Li Mochou was rather startled: "She is aware of my fierce (li hai) palm but wants to try it." She channeled her inner force to the palm and said: "I also want to try Tao Hua Island's "Luo Ying Divine Sword Palm" (luo ying shen jian zhang)." She moved her left palm to parry Huang Rong's palm, her right palm aiming for the shoulder. Both palms moved at the same time, but the right palm also ejected two needles aiming between Huang Rong's chest and belly. This striking and simultaneously ejecting needles stance had been developed by herself after leaving Gu Mu. The adversary who only guarded against the palms wouldn't think of being attacked with the needles at such a close distance. Many wuxia experts had been killed by this move of hers.

Huang Rong retracted her left palm to parry, her right hand moving about her bosom as if she herself wanted to pull out a hidden projectile (an qi) but it was already too late, the needles were already about five inches near her ribs, even someone with a much higher ability than her wouldn't avoid being hit. Li Mochou felt up surging joy as she saw the needles penetrating the cloth. "Oh!" Huang Rong cried bending, her right hand touching her stomach, her left palm striking Li Mochou's chest. That palm really came swiftly, Li Mochou cried: "Good! She dodged and struck with both

palms aiming at Huang Rong's chest. She knew the poison would instantly show its effect. So her stroke only was meant to shove Huang Rong a bit before she died of the poisoning. She saw Huang Rong's upper body only showing a slight reaction and she wondered how the poison could paralyze that quick. Her pair of palms soon touched the chest of her adversary; she felt some slight pain from being pricked. Hurriedly and in great surprise she leapt backwards, looking at her palms she saw two tiny holes, black blood oozing out, revealing she had been injured by her own needles. She was startled, angry and didn't understand how it could have happened. She saw Huang Rong taking two apples from her bosom with a smile, lifted them high, and showing a needle in each apple. Li Mochou now realized that Huang Rong hid the apples, didn't try to parry her stroke, put her hand in her bosom to hold the apples, receiving the needles and lured Li Mochou to strike the apples herself.

Li Mochou was not a stupid person, but in a duel of cunning today she had to admit defeat, she moved her hand to her bosom to take the antidote. But with a windy sound Huang Rong had attacked her face. Li Mochou hurriedly lifted her left hand to fend, suddenly Huang Rong's snow white palm opened, its five fingers, shaped gracefully like an orchid, threatened the xiao hai accupoint on her right elbow. She thought: "Is that the famous "Orchid Hand Strikes Accupoint" (lan hua fu xue shou)?" Her right hand, which had failed to take the antidote, was trying to grasp Huang Rong's hand. Huang Rong retracted her right hand, her left hand aiming at the que pen accupoint on the neck. She attacked using Luo ying palm alternately with orchid hand, her moves were not only swift and fierce but also utterly graceful. Li Mochou couldn't help thinking: "Today I have witnessed Tao Hua Island's divine techniques, it is really superb, and even if I was not poisoned I wouldn't be her match." She eagerly withdrew to take the antidote, but Huang Rong attacked

again, not giving her time for it. The "Soul Freezing Silver Needle" had severe poison on it, hadn't Li Mochou been used to it, she would already have broken down. But even so, as soon as the poison had reached the pit of her stomach, it would be hopeless for her. Huang Rong observed her face getting paler, her adversary got weaker and weaker, Huang Rong thought of the demoness killing the Wu brothers' mother, at last now she would succumb to her own poison, Huang Rong pressed steadily on, but also guarded herself, fearing a last counter attempt by her adversary.

Li Mochou felt a numbness creeping up her elbow, after several stances more the numbness had reached her armpit, her arm couldn't bend anymore. She called out: "Hold a minute!" Stepping aside she said: "Mrs. Guo, since I've killed many people, I hadn't expected to live this long. In martial arts and cunning I'm inferior to you; it's fitting to die by your hands. But I must be bold and beg something of you."

Huang Rong: "Beg for what?" She guessed the demoness was trying to use delaying tactics so she watched her hands carefully; she saw her arms sagging and she then listened to her adversary saying: "I don't have an affectionate relationship with my shi mei, but her child is adorably cute, I beseech you to show a forgiving heart and not to take her young life."

Huang Rong felt the Scarlet Serpent Deity spoke with sincerity, she was unable to suppress being moved. She thought: "This demoness' misdeeds heaped up like a mountain, who would have thought that in the time of approaching death she would show such a loving concern for my daughter." She answered: "The parents of this child are no ordinary people, if I let her live she would pose a great danger to me."

Li Mochou sighed and said with a failing voice: "I understand, but I'm still hoping you would be forgiving"

Huang Rong was very moved, but wanted to try her further, she approached and hit an accupoint before taking a bottle out, asking: "Is this the antidote?"

Li Mochou: "Yes!"

Huang Rong: "I can't forgive two people at the same time; should I forgive you, I have to kill the baby. If you yourself choose to die, I will save the baby."

Li Mochou was totally dumbfounded. Never did she dream of getting a second chance to live, but she was unable to ask Huang Rong to kill the child, whereas to sacrifice herself in order to save the child, she saw Huang Rong in front of her, waving a pill from the bottle, waiting for her reply. She trembled, stuttering: "I, I"

Huang Rong thought: "The fact alone that she is hesitating counts as a plus point for her. No matter what choice she makes, I must let her live. She has accumulated such a huge blood debt; there will certainly be someone in the future that will take revenge on her."

Thereupon she said smilingly: "Elder Li, many thanks to you for showing such a loving care for Xiang'er." Li Mochou, confused: "What?" Huang Rong chuckled: "The baby is surnamed Guo with the name Xiang, she is my and Guo Jing's daughter. Soon after her birth she fell into Miss Long hands, I don't know how you came to your misunderstanding. Because you have taken good care of her, then junior must thank you profusely."

Saying that, she bowed clasping her hands, then put a pill in Li Mochou's mouth, asking: "Is this enough?" Li Mochou answered sorrowfully: "I'm heavily poisoned, I need three

pills." Huang Rong answered: "Very well", gave her two more pills, then thought that the antidote could be of some use later on, so she put the bottle in her bosom, saying: "Your accupoints would unseal in three hours time."

Huang Rong returned to the forest and thought: "Fu'er would be impatiently waiting for me, but if she sees her sister she will be very happy." Entering the cane circle her body went cold like entering an icehouse. The cane circle looked no different but Guo Xiang was nowhere to be seen!. Huang Rong's heart beat madly, although usually very smart, she didn't know what to do.

After a while she calmed herself down and thought: "I must not worry, if a person took Xiang'er during my fight with Li Mochou, he can't be very far." She climbed up the highest tree to look off in the distance from that high place. The surrounding area of Xiangyang was flat; she saw nothing suspicious within a radius of several li. Huang Rong thought: "This person must still be in the near vicinity." Thereupon she looked carefully for traces around the cane circle but nothing was moved away. She pondered: "This cane maze is arranged according to Jiu Gong Ba Gua positions according to my own father's concept; except Tao Hua Island's [Peach Blossom Island] disciples nobody has an inkling of it. Even Jinlun Fawang (Golden Wheel Monk) with his broad knowledge couldn't solve its secrets. Has my father arrived?...Oh my god!"

She remembered her meeting with Jinlun Fawang several months ago, she had arranged a stone maze, she had explained to Yang Guo about the system, although he was not yet skilled in Jiu Gong Ba Gua, he wouldn't have difficulties solving this cane maze. Thinking of Yang Guo she couldn't help but be anxious: "Fu'er cut off his arm so he has a feud with the Guo family and now Xiang'er is in his hands; he doesn't have to kill her, he could just leave her in the

wilderness and she would certainly die." Thinking about the baby, she thought of her bad luck of being taken soon after she was born, she uncontrollably shed a tear. But being very experienced, she looked again very carefully for traces around the spot but couldn't find any. She mused: "Although his qing gong is extraordinary, he must have left traces here in the mud, or could he possibly fly?"

This guess of Huang Rong was correct. Guo Xiang was taken by Yang Guo and he got into the cane maze from the air!

That day Yang Guo observed how Huang Rong hit Guo Jing's accupoint and then followed her daughter out of town. Yang Guo also followed them from afar, thinking: "Aunt Guo, your daughter owes me an arm, if your husband doesn't succeed in cutting it off, let me do it. I can see you, you can't see me; if you want to save your daughter's arm, I think that won't be easy." Huang Rong and her daughter being preoccupied didn't realize they were being followed. The meeting with Li Mochou in the small town and the fight, all were observed by Yang Guo. As the fighters left the forest, he immediately jumped up a tree, bound the end of a cane to the tree, slid into the middle of the cane circle on the cane, clamped Guo Xiang's waist with his feet, then pulled his body up again into the tree. After landing on the ground again after several tree jumps, he returned to the small town. He saw Guo Fu on the street corner, holding the reins of the hong ma (red horse) waiting impatiently for her mother. Yang Guo leapt to sit astride the red horse. Guo Fu was startled, turning she saw that the unexpected rider was Yang Guo. She unsheathed her sword, her normal sword, not Xiao Longnu's "Lady Sword", which she didn't like using.

Yang Guo saw her face turning pale with a frightened look, if he had wanted to cut her arm off now it would be all too easy. Somehow in the last moment he moved his right shoulder, the empty sleeve wrapped around the sword and flung it

away. Guo Fu had let the sword go and it hit the corner of a wall. Yang Guo's left hand snatched the reins; clamping his legs to the horse's belly urged it to gallop away like the wind. Guo Fu slowly walked to pick up her sword; it was bent like a square.

To use soft material as a weapon was GuMu Pai's [Ancient Tomb's] unique wugong, Li Mochou used a whisk and Dragon girl used a silk belt. Yang Guo used his strong inner energy and the sleeve had struck like a steel whip. Yang Guo, holding Guo Xiang, sped the 'han xue bao ma' (precious horse with sweat like blood) soon leaving the small town a couple of li behind, that's why they couldn't be detected by Huang Rong from the tree top.

Yang Guo rode speedily; he saw the trees on the roadside flying away. He looked at Guo Xiang on his bosom, seeing her tender and delicate small face, he thought: "Uncle and Aunt Guo, your youngest daughter will always be mine, think of it as a kind of compensation for my lost arm. They would feel grieved and dejected, especially because they excel me." After a while he thought: "Why didn't I take revenge directly? Is it because Guo Fu is a beautiful young girl? If the one who cut off my arm was a male, would I also have forgiven him?" Thinking about it half a day he could only shake his head and smile wryly. He himself couldn't understand his unstable and unpredictable behavior.

After traveling two hundred li there gradually appeared houses with smoke coming from them. He got something to eat and Guo Xiang some goat milk. He decided to go to the Ancient Tomb looking for the Xiao Longnu. After several days he arrived at Mount Zhongnan. As the horse climbed the mountain and found the right path to the Ancient Tomb he pondered about past things.

The inscription 'Tomb of the Living Dead' still stood on the majestic tombstone. After Li Mochou's attack, the tomb had been sealed, if one wanted to enter, they had to use the secret entrance through the water. For him it wouldn't pose a problem but what about Guo Xiang? She would drown in the water. But the thought of soon meeting Xiao Longnu in the tomb greatly excited him. He took a pastry from his pocket, chewed a bit for Guo Xiang, and then he found a cave nearby. He put Guo Xiang in it and hid the cave mouth with thorny wood. Whether he met Xiao Longnu or not in the tomb, he planned to return and put the baby in a safer place.

Suddenly he heard the far away sound of weapons clashing coming from the direction of the Chongyang Palace. He was suspicious for a bit and then saw a buzzing silver wheel flying fiercely into the sky. That was Jinlun Fawang's weapon. Growing curious, he hurriedly followed the sound to the Chongyang Palace. During this time, Xiao Longnu was enduring Quanzhen Five Masters' "Gathering of the Big Dipper" (Qi Xing Ju Hui) and Jinlun Fawang's wheel strike, her body seriously injured. Had Yang Guo arrived earlier, he could have prevented the disaster. But how could things be as easy as one desired? Life was full of sorrow and joy, the difference between disaster and good fortune was often very small.

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Upon seeing Yang Guo, the Quanzhen Five Masters knew this mess was escalating. Qiu Chuji cried out: "My Chongyang Palace has been a respected place but today all of you are here to violate it. Why is that?"

Wang Chuyi was also furious, shouting: "Long Guniang [Miss Long], even though your Gu Mu sect and our Quanzhen sect share the same mountain ridge, we both stick to our own sides. What is the reason you are leading these foreign

people from the West, these evil miscreants, to kill many disciples of mine?"

Xiao Longnu, badly injured, thought, these people couldn't tell right from wrong, why bother arguing with them? Their many disciples witnessed how Yin Zhiping was pierced by her sword and how Zhao Zhijing was wounded but, in this time of trouble, nobody came forward to explain the truth.

Yang Guo gently stretched his left arm to support Xiao Longnu's waist, softly saying: "Gu Gu, let us go back to Gu Mu. Don't pay attention to these people!"

Xiao Longnu then asked: "Does your arm still hurt?"

Yang Guo shook his head, replying: "It's all fine."

Xiao Longnu continued: "Has the Passion Flower (Qing Hua) Poison in your body acted up again?"

Yang Guo replied: "A few times, but it's nothing to worry about."

After being slashed by Xiao Longnu, Zhao Zhijing went to hide, not daring to show his face. Seeing the Quanzhen Five Masters coming out, he realized that after a series of investigation, he would be expelled from his charge and also severely punished. Originally he was only of a short-tempered and narrow-minded nature, not really a traitorous and wicked person. Only he was considered the first at Wu Gong in the third generation disciples, yet the Zhang Jiao (leader of the generation) position fell to Yin Zhiping. His resentment festered, trapping him into his erroneous way of thinking. Quickly looking at the situation, disturbed and afraid of his five teachers, he grasped at the present opportunity. Suppose Jinlun Fawang and the Mongolian warriors wiped out the Quanzhen Five Masters, he would be able to escape forever. Also, he saw Yang Guo's right arm

missing and left arm holding Xiao Longnu, looking like his hands were bound, waiting for violent death. To the betraying disciple, Yang Guo was his most hated person, now he had a good opportunity, why would he let it pass? Glancing at Lu Qingdu who was nearby, he loudly shouted: "Treacherous disciple Yang Guo, your two masters are speaking to you. You don't kneel down and kowtow, how dare you to pay no attention?"

Yang Guo turned back, his eyes filled with hatred, and thought: "Gu Gu has already wounded one Quanzhen smelly priest. Today I'll temporarily pay no mind to you. I'll deal with you later." Sweeping his empty sleeve at the crowd disgustedly while supporting Xiao Longnu, they then moved forward.

Zhao Zhijing shouted: "Fight!" He and Lu Qingdu both pulled out their swords, attacking Yang Guo's right side. Although Zhao Zhijing had been wounded earlier, the damage was not severe. His sword was thrust towards Yang Guo's missing arm to stop him from fighting back but it was held down by a strong wind, which was actually caused by Yang Guo's cultivated internal energy.

Even though Qiu Chuji didn't particularly care for Yang Guo's arrogant ways of doing as he pleased, and not honoring traditions, he thought about Guo Jing's great trust and also his master-disciple bond with Yang Guo's father, Yang Kang. He shouted: "Zhijing put down your sword. Show mercy!"

On the other side Ma Guangzuo loudly cursed: "Old fart, aren't you ashamed? Stabbing a person's missing arm!" He and Yang Guo were very good friends. Seeing Yang Guo in danger, Ma Guangzuo rushed to help but he was a distance away so his help was too late.

There suddenly was a flashing gray shadow; Lu Qingdu's fat body flew up. He let out the Wah-Wah battle cry before a

crashing sound came as the fat body hit Nimoxing. Based on Nimoxing's Wu Gong, even though it took him by surprise, he shouldn't have been hit. Since both his legs had been removed, he used both hands to prop himself with a crutch, and was not able to push out to defend himself. He was hit immediately, and collapsed. While trying to support himself on the ground, Nimoxing's crutch hit Lu Qingdu in the back, knocking him out.

On this side Yang Guo's right foot stepped on Zhao Zhijing's long sword, Zhao Zhijing used his force to pull it out, his face turning bright red. Unexpectedly, the long sword wouldn't move an inch.

At the time both swords were thrusting towards him, Yang Guo's empty right sleeve fiercely brushed out, sending a rush of great force to throw Lu Qingdu to the ground. Zhao Zhijing, however, felt the sleeve abruptly sinking, caused by an "extremely heavy" body anchor. This forced the long sword down. Yang Guo stepped out with his foot, stepping on the blade of the sword. He had practiced his swordplay and anchoring technique in mountain streams and even strong current couldn't topple him. This time, when he put his foot down, it was like the weight of a mountain, how would Zhao Zhijing's force be able to pull away the sword?

Yang Guo coldly said: "Zhao Dao Shi [Priest Zhao], at the time I was with Guo Da Sha [the Chivalrous Guo] at Da Sheng Guan, you pronounced yourself my master. Today how would you be able to go on saying that? Considering that in the past I used to call you master, I'll let you off!" Saying that, without moving his right foot, the powerful force beneath it suddenly vanished without a trace.

Applying full force to pull back the sword that was suddenly released, Zhao Zhijing's hand was suddenly in the air. The sword snapped back, making a crashing sound as its handle

hit his chest hard. Undoubtedly, the sword handle struck him with his own force. With this strength, if used to hit an enemy, the enemy wouldn't be able to block and must use internal force to counter the strike. Now hitting himself involuntarily with no counter-force, Zhao Zhijing felt severe pain in his chest and coughed up blood. His vision went dark, his eyes rolled upwards and he collapsed.

Wang Chuyi and Liu Chuxuan pulled their swords out from their sheaths, dividing themselves left and right to attack Yang Guo. Suddenly, a shadow dashed out, knocking the two swords out of the way. This person was of course Nimoxing. Even though he did hit Lu Qingdu, throwing him onto the ground, his mind was hateful. It was originally Yang Guo who started his troubles. Whirling his crutch and leaping forward, his left crutch struck the two swords while the right one attacked Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu.

Knowing Nimoxing's Wu Gong by heart, Yang Guo would only use his empty sleeve but then was afraid that he wouldn't be able to subdue Nimoxing in one strike. By now Xiao Longnu's body was powerless, leaning feebly against Yang Guo's so his body slanted to the left while he was wielding his right empty sleeve. Rolling Xiao Longnu's delicate waist, he let her body lean on the right front of his chest. Then his left hand drew out the black heavy iron sword [Xuan Tie Zhong Jian] that he carried on his back. 'Pu' the sword hummed, sounding both deep and dull like a wooden stick beating leather. Nimoxing's right hand cracked and a shadow darted into the sky. It was actually his iron crutch fiercely flying upwards. This crutch was extremely heavy but unexpectedly flew up 20 feet high in the air and then dropped down behind Yu Xu Dong Shan [Cave of the Jade Void].

This was the first time Yang Guo used demonic Dugu Qiubai's [Du Gu seeking a loss] heavy sword on an enemy. Seeing it had such power, he couldn't help being secretly startled.

Nimoxing felt half his body in pain, his right arm uncontrollably shaking. But he had lived an incomparably brave life so, with a roar, using his remaining crutch, pushed up ten feet in the air and came down with the left iron crutch in his palm. Yang Guo thought since he had already tried the hard strength of the sword, he would now try the supple strength. The tip of the heavy sword trembled. With his internal energy pouring out, Nimoxing would be thrown 20 or 30 feet, it would be impossible not to injure muscles and bones. Seeing Xiao Longnu severely injured, Yang Guo was filled with bitterness in his heart, deciding this time he would strike with no mercy. But just when his arm was about to release his internal force, he saw Nimoxing's body in midair with both legs cut off, fiercely reminding him of his own missing arm. He couldn't help but think that they shared the same problem so he didn't wield his heavy sword up but pushed it down instead. The iron crutch pierced down, dust flew up, and half the crutch was stuck into the ground.

Nimoxing grasped the iron crutch, thinking to use force to pull it out but suddenly his right arm was pressed by the heavy sword. Unexpectedly his pressure point was sealed so he couldn't use any strength in the least. Yang Guo said: "Today I'll spare your life. Just hurry back to India." Nimoxing's face turned ashen. Perfectly still, he couldn't say a word.

Although Xiaoxiang Zi and Yin Kexi saw this turn of events, they didn't think Yang Guo could advance his skills in just months, thinking it had to be because Nimoxing's amputated legs were of no use. Yin Kexi rushed forward a few steps, pulling out the iron crutch and handed it over to Nimoxing. Having the crutch, Nimoxing used it to prop himself up, thinking to leap far away. Who would expect that his arm was numb and limp? As soon as he tried, he collapsed with a plop.

Xiaoxiang Zi always took pleasure in others' misfortunes. As long as other people were having bad luck, regardless of whether friend or foe, he found it joyful. He thought: "This Indian dwarf has always been arrogant, not submitting to me, this is at last over. Just now you rushed out to capture Yang Guo. That was precisely what gave him a good opportunity." Then he jumped out, shouting: "Baby Yang Guo, you've wronged our Prince several times, quickly come with father!"

Yang Guo thought: "Gu Gu is heavily injured. We must hurry to go and treat her. Right now surrounded by many powerful enemies, if I don't kill anyone, it will be hard to escape." In a low voice he asked Xiao Longnu: "Are you hurting very much?"

Xiao Longnu replied: "You are holding me, I... I am very happy."

Yang Guo lifted his head up, facing Xiaoxiang Zi, and said: "Fight!" He drew out the black iron sword from between his waist, the sword tip approximately two feet from his body. He held it out steadily. Xiaoxiang Zi saw this crude black sword with a blunt tip and no edge, appearing to be a dumb piece of iron. He thought: "Sure enough, this boy's swordplay is very fast and his agile movements fluctuate but, with this iron bar, his sword skills won't be of much use." He then said: "Shit" While saying that, he wielded his steel "Melancholy Rod" to hit the heavy sword.

Yang Guo's sword stayed motionless while he channeled his inner strength into it. Only a 'puff' sound could be heard as the sword and the iron rod clashed. The "Melancholy Rod" broke immediately, sending several pieces flying. Xiaoxiang Zi cried out: "Heavenly gods!" and then scrambled backwards. Yang Guo then stretched out his sword and struck left and right, breaking both of Xiaoxiang Zi's arms.

Yang Guo had repeatedly defeated opponents, Lu Qingdu, Zhao Zhijing and Nimoxing, creating sensation among the various people in front of the Cave of the Jade Void. But this time he didn't even move his body, nor lift his arm, but simply used internal energy to break Xiaoxiang Zi's weapon, these people were even more puzzled, looking at each other in disbelief, all thinking: "This person's martial skills were really unbelievable!"

Yin Kexi was a merchant from the Western region so he knew a treasure when he saw one. Seeing Yang Guo's heavy sword sending Nimoxing's iron crutch flying, he was already secretly startled, thinking: "A sword this powerful is really not common. The blade is deep black with a hint of red glow, is it possible that it was actually forged from black iron? This black iron is the world's most precious metal. Even an ounce is very difficult to find. By adding just a little to a common sword or spear, ordinary iron would become a sharp weapon. Where did he find that much of the black iron? Also, if the sword was indeed made from the black iron, how could it not weigh 40-50 catties [1 catty = 1.1 pounds/ 500 grams]? If so, how could Yang Guo be this agile?" Actually, this sword weighed 64 catties altogether. If it was not this heavy, even though Yang Guo's internal force was strong, he still wouldn't be able to send out such power. Now Yin Kexi saw Xiaoxiang Zi's "Melancholy Rod" scattering all over the place so he was even more convinced that this sword was a divine object. Yet he still acted nonchalant. He was in the jewelry businesses, once he saw a rare treasure; his heart would be filled with delighted greed. It didn't matter if he had to buy or cheat, to rob or steal; it just had to be quick. As soon as he saw Yang Guo's heavy sword, he was burning with greed. So he jumped out immediately, shaking his Jin Long whip to grab the sword.

Yang Guo had spent time with him in the Passionless Valley [Jue Qing Gu] and saw him always laughing politely and amicably so he didn't have any hostility towards Yin Kexi.

Then he saw the Jin Long whip coiling his way. This whip was heavily decorated with precious stones, diamonds and jades. He let the whip wrap around his sword and said: "Yin Xiong [Brother Yin], you and I have yet to celebrate with a drink, pull back the whip and make way. Looks like you've got quite a few jewels on your soft whip. If damaged, it would be a pity." Yin Kexi smiled and said: "Is that right?" and then applied force to snatch the sword. Yang Guo just stood still, not moving in the least.

This time Yin Kexi stood near, analyzing the situation. This sword was cast from black iron. Diamonds were the world's hardest object, and could cut anything without damaging themselves. But surprisingly the big diamond embedded at the tip of his whip couldn't scratch the black iron sword. His heart was on fire as he knew that his opponent's martial skills were ferocious. If not attacking him by surprise, it would be difficult to snatch the sword. So he said: "Yang Xiong [Brother Yang]'s Kung Fu is excellent. Congratulations! I admit defeat." While his mouth was saying these sweet words, he flicked his right wrist. Suddenly metal flashed. In his left hand was a dagger. His arm flew out fiercely to stab Xiao Longnu's chest.

He did this not because he wanted to injure Xiao Longnu. Only he knew that Yang Guo loved her and if he saw her in danger, he would have to save her life. By creating a diversion, he would be able to snatch the precious sword. Yang Guo saw the situation, alarmed. Yin Kexi shouted: "Let go of the sword!" and sent all his body strength to the right arm, pulling the whip to seize the sword.

Hearing "Let go of the sword," Yang Guo did as he was told, sending out the sword. The sword was long while the dagger was short. The heavy sword was between the three of them so the dagger couldn't reach Xiao Longnu's body. At that time, Yang Guo was desperate so he sent out the sword with

a force that was extremely fierce. Yin Kexi knew perfectly well that this sword was heavy so he had already braced himself against the force. However, he didn't expect the coming force to be this violent. Seeing that it was too late to escape, he summoned his internal energy while both hands pushed out. Then there came a crashing sound before he fell back five or six steps. He managed to stand firm and put on a smile on his face to cover his misery. Only in a short while he felt as if his internal organs had been turned inside out. He stood still, not daring to breathe or move even half a step, just like a stiff corpse.

Yang Guo walked over to him and extended his hand to retrieve his black iron sword [Xuan Tie Jian]. He lightly shook the sword, and then heard a "ding ding dong dong" sound. Under the bright sunlight, precious stones sparkled everywhere. These were the stones embedded in the Jin Long whip that had just broken into fragments.

Yang Guo called out: "Jinlun Fawang, do we settle our business today or wait for some other day?"

Jinlun Fawang saw him successively defeating the three big masters, Nimoxing, Xiaoxiang Zi, and Yin Kexi, injuring each opponent in only one move. How this young man's martial skills were so high was actually quite unconceivable. If he himself stepped forward to fight, even though he would not be defeated like the other three fighters, to seek victory would not be easy. At this moment all the heroes were gathering, if he walked away, how would he keep face? He thought: "Yang Guo has a missing arm. Even though his left hand is fierce, his right side is disadvantaged. I will just keep attacking his right side. He's worried about Xiao Longnu's injury. As time drags on, his mind must be restless." As a result, from his sleeve he took out the five wheels -- gold, silver, copper, steel, and lead. In his heart, he knew that this was really a moment of life or death, of honor or shame. He was not

careless in the least yet his expression remained casual like he had no cares. He strolled out, smiling: "Yang Xiong Di [Brother Yang], I congratulate you as we meet again. You've obtained this powerfully divine sword! This is quite a magical weapon. I only fear this old monk also can't handle it." He still didn't have a strategy to win so he used the situation to his benefit. He heavily praised this black iron sword, leading the crowd to think that this youngster was only lucky to obtain this God-sent weapon.

Xiao Longnu leaned against Yang Guo's chest, in her dazed state seeing Jinlun Fawang holding his wheels. She thought that, depending on Yang Guo's strength alone, he wouldn't be able to beat the enemy so she said in a low voice: "Guo'er, go find me a sword, we... we... together... together use Yu Nu Su Xin swordplay "Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden Swordplay" to get rid of him." Yang Guo felt pain in his heart, softly replied: "Gu Gu, you set your mind at ease. Guo'er alone can handle this." Xiao Longnu moved to the left to shield his body as much as possible, trying to keep him out of danger. Yang Guo felt both gratitude and joy so he said out loud: "Gu Gu, today we two will fight this devil crowd together. In this life, I have no regrets." and pointed his black iron sword straight out.

Fawang didn't dare to meet Yang Guo's force directly, he jumped backwards. Immediately there came a Wu-Wu sound from a spinning lead wheel Fawang tossed out. Yang Guo lifted his sword to cut it but the lead wheel flew past his body back to Fawang, unexpectedly untouched. Then there came a loud rumbling buzzing Wu-Wu, Weng-Weng sound and flashing gold and silver lights. The five wheels flew towards him from five different directions.

For fear that he would affect Xiao Longnu's injured condition, Yang Guo stood there motionless. Fawang's five wheels were only a deceptive attack, just to try out Yang Guo's actions.

The five wheels circled close to the two persons' bodies, flying back and forth repeatedly. He saw Yang Guo would certainly not lift his sword to pursue, then understood and was secretly delighted: "You don't dare to move your body, afraid that you would worsen Xiao Longnu's injured condition. The situation is bad and there is no way out. My Zong Yue Yuan attack "Vertical Jump from Distance" can not be defeated." The opponent has a missing arm and also had to protect the injured girl. According to Fawang's rank, there couldn't be a fight like this. However, he knew that a good opportunity of this kind was hard to come by. If Xiao Longnu recovered, the two persons combined couldn't be defeated. Even if Xiao Longnu was injured to near death and Yang Guo was distracted, he himself might not necessarily be able to beat Yang Guo. He only had today to take advantage of the situation and kill them once and for all so there would be no more trouble in the future. As to whether or not it would be fair, let's not pay much attention to it.

The crowd nearby also understood the circumstance and thought Fawang had stepped over the line. Ma Guangzuo loudly shouted: "Big Monk, are you a hero or a scum?"

Fawang appeared not to hear the comment. The five wheels were continuously thrown out and then came back, still circling around Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu. Then the wheels flew high and low, straight and slanting, making both soft and loud noises. The spectators were all bedazzled and anxious.

Suddenly Ma Guangzuo loudly cried out "Ohh". This was the slanting copper wheel flying by, curving fiercely and just passing the top of his head. The wheel cut a piece out of his scalp, which still had a chunk of hair. Blood dripped profusely to the ground. Ma Guangzuo held his head with both hands, cursing, but didn't dare rush out to fight.

Yang Guo knew Xiao Longnu was severely injured. The more they were delayed, the less time for treatment there was. Anxiety filled his heart. Fawang called out: "Be careful!" Suddenly the five wheels returned again, coming side by side about to strike the two people like five powerful waves. Yang Guo's whole body strength rushed to his left arm, the tip of his sword vibrating. 'dang' 'dang' 'dang' sounds echoed as the sword brushed away the gold, copper and steel wheels. Everyone was alarmed, dust flew up, and the silver wheel and the lead wheel were broken, dropping on the ground.

Fawang cried out loudly, flying upwards. His left hand pushed aside the steel wheel while grabbing the gold and copper wheels and he then ferociously smashed down for the top of Yang Guo's head. Yang Guo didn't ward him off but the black iron sword thrust out from his chest. The sword was long while the wheels were short. The wheels were yet to smash his head but the tip of his sword was already less than half a foot away from Fawang's chest. Fawang immediately retreated. His forward attack was no doubt very fast but the retreat was also fast. It was not so clear how he cross stepped, going left and then suddenly jumping back several feet. This was actually quite rare in the martial world. The spectators were dazzled, cheering the one they were rooting for. One cried out loudly: "Good!"

Yang Guo suddenly wielded the black iron sword to the back. Then came a sound, from behind and the copper wheel was chopped in half. And even before the copper wheel hit the ground, the sword whipped out horizontally and the two pieces turned into four. Although the blade of the black iron sword had no sharp point, he applied his internal energy to break the wheel. When the spectators saw Fawang's lightness Kung Fu, they shouted in appreciation. Now they saw the strange power of Yang Guo's divine sword, they all were startled, falling silent.

In just a short while, three out of five of Fawang's wheels were destroyed. Still he was not discouraged, brandishing his gold and steel wheels around without fear. Yang Guo stretched out his sword while Fawang sidestepped to evade Yang Guo's sword strikes. This time he didn't throw out his wheels. Even though he wouldn't be able to attack from afar, this was actually more powerful. When he saw Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu together, attacking on the left side and resisting on the right side, he jumped up high in the air and bore down with both wheels, sending out the Wu-Wu humming sound. Yang Guo's black iron sword did appear quite dull but no matter how Fawang changed his moves, he couldn't get within two or three steps of the couple. Forty or fifty moves passed, both Fawang's wheels returned again and were about to pound into Xiao Longnu. Yang Guo thrust out the black iron sword, and the soft clattering sound was heard as the two weapons met. Both Yang Guo and Fawang sent out their internal forces to their weapons. Both refused to budge and were now motionless in a deadlock situation.

Yang Guo could feel that the opponent's continuing waves of energy growing stronger and stronger, he was secretly alarmed: "This person's internal energy is surprisingly high." He also thought: "We're already matching internal forces and the full power of the black iron sword can't be lashed out. If this battle of internal forces goes on for a long time, the one with more profound energy would have the upper hand. If he moves his body forward further, I'll use the sleeve to strike him by surprise." As a result, his left arm was slowly pulled back. The two people were originally five feet or so apart. The distance was gradually reduced to five feet and then four and a half, from four and a half to four feet.

As Fawang's disciples Da'erba and Huo Du, who were constantly guarding their master's body nearby, saw that their master was gradually gaining the upper hand, they were delighted, moving forward several steps. While Da'erba

cared about his master's safety, he also hoped that his master would not injure his reincarnated "Da Shi Xiong" [big apprentice brother]. Huo Du on the other hand was secretly plotting against Yang Guo. He wielded his folding fan, appearing to be cooling himself, but he actually was waiting for an opportunity to launch his fan attack.

As Qiu Chuji and Wang Chuyi saw Huo Du's eyes glinting as he moved forward, they knew that he thought to help his master. The two persons looked at the situation and thought: "Even though Yang Guo has become our sect's enemy, real men are open and upright. Losing or winning depends on the original fight. How could Mount Zhongnan allow this scheming disciple to act?" They pulled out their long swords, stepping forward and at the same time sending Huo Du a warning stare. Priest Qiu and Priest Wang's beards and hair were all white but the two had practiced martial arts for a long time; their faces had a red glow. The two swords also emitted blue-green lights like a rainbow, showing their own chilling power. Intimidated, Huo Du dare not act rashly.

By now Yang Guo's left arm gradually shrank and he was already only three feet away from Fawang. He thought: "If this monk moves forward another half foot, my right sleeve will strike him. Although it may not be enough to take his life, it will knock him out." As Fawang saw his right shoulder slightly moving, he understood what Yang Guo meant to do, thought: "Even though your arm has been cut off, you still have the shirt sleeve. If applying internal force and sending it out, it will be the same as a sharp soft whip. I'll let you do this and deflect your strike. When you wield your sleeve, the strength in your left arm must lessen and then I'll take advantage of the situation by using my full force attack and as a result your body will be heavily injured."

Xiao Longnu leaned against Yang Guo's body in a perpetually dazed state. As Yang Guo was summoning his internal energy

and accelerating it, his body became hotter and hotter. Xiao Longnu felt his face emitting a steam so she opened her eyes, seeing the beads of sweat seeping out at the side of his forehead. She used her sleeve to gently wipe the sweat for him. Then she saw his serious expression, both eyes looking straight ahead so she followed his gaze and turned her head to look. She couldn't help being startled by Fawang's wide-open copper eyes in front of her. Seeing these two eyes with fierce glows, she shut her eyes quickly and then opened them again. Fawang's eyes were still near. Xiao Longnu was cuddling and leaning against her loved one. Having a pair of wicked eyes fixedly gazing at her was really disgusting. This time she didn't think that Fawang was fighting with Yang Guo. She only knew that this monk was a really evil person and also she was not willing to let him disturb her sweet time right now so she quickly dipped her hand into her bosom, took out a jade bee golden needle, and slowly extended her hand towards Fawang's left eye.

Aside from the fact that this golden needle had a virulent poison on it, any ordinary embroidery needle pricking an eyeball would blind that eye. This time Xiao Longnu only wanted to get rid of the big disgusting eyes, she didn't mean to shoot it out fiercely. With her severe injury, her stretched hand was soft and weak. Her hand was really very slow.

But Fawang and Yang Guo were in a deadlock situation. In this critical stage, one who moved even a little would be paying dearly. Xiao Longnu's golden needle slowly coming near, Fawang could not resist in the least bit. Seeing the golden needle moving closer, from two feet to one foot, from one foot to half a foot, Fawang cried out loudly, pushing both wheels out to the front while struggling to flit backwards. But after all, the overwhelming force from both weapons could not be unloaded so he just firmly stood there and then sat down on the ground. Da'erba and Huo Du called out "Master!" and rushed out to hold Fawang.

Yang Guo's sword then moved twice, splitting both gold and steel wheels in half. Then he moved forward two steps, wielding his sword to cut the top of Fawang's head. Fawang just breathed in, only feeling melancholy death coming. He was weary and did not have the strength to resist. Da'erba lifted his golden rod and Huo Du raised his steel fan, together blocking the black iron sword. But the strength of the sword blow was strangely fierce. Da'erba and Huo Du's knees felt weak, unable to stop the falling sword. They knelt down on the ground but still held their weapons, desperately shielding Fawang.

As the force from the black iron sword was growing stronger, Da'erba and Huo Du felt as if their backs were about to break, their body joints rumbling. Huo Du said: "Shi Ge (older apprentice brother), you hold on alone for a moment. Little brother will save the master first and will be back to help you." Originally the two people's combined force was already unable to resist the force. Now with only Da'erba, how could he block the power of the heavy sword? But he would give up his life to protect his master so he called out: "Good!" and furiously pushed his golden rod upwards.

The two of them were speaking in Tibetan, which Yang Guo could not understand. He only felt the increasing force from the golden rod and was about to apply more force to press down but then Huo Du jumped out.

Who would have thought that Huo Du didn't plan to save his master but only to seek his own retreat? He called out: "Shi Ge [Apprentice Brother], little brother will go back to Tibet and diligently practice martial skills. After ten years I will certainly look for this Yang boy and avenge you and master!" As he said that, he turned around and leapt away as if flying.

Da'erba was duped by his apprentice brother; he was unable to control his anger. He also remembered that Yang Guo was

his reincarnated big apprentice brother, how could he heartlessly wrong their master like this? He loudly said: "Da Shi Ge [Big Apprentice Brother], please spare little brother's life. Wait for me to save the master and search for that scum [heart of a wolf & lung of a dog] of a disciple so I could break him into ten thousand pieces. After that I'll voluntarily throw my life into Da Shi Ge [Big Apprentice Brother]'s hand. At that time you'll kill me or cut me, little brother won't even dare to frown."

Yang Guo listened to him mumbling a long speech, he naturally didn't understand. However, Huo Du narrowly escaped death but this person was loyal and did right by his master. He actually understood. Yang Guo saw that his expression was earnest and respected him as a true man who was not too smart. He also saw Xiao Longnu's tender eyes gazing at him. Suddenly his thought to kill and take revenge was dissipated, only feeling that it didn't matter if all the lifetime grudges were not resolved. He immediately lifted his black iron sword and said: "You are released!"

Da'erba got up, but only after a great effort. Strength escaped his whole body and he couldn't hold on to his golden rod. A 'tang' sound was heard as it dropped on the ground. He bent down and bowed to Yang Guo several times, thanking Yang Guo for not killing them. At this time, Fawang still sat motionless on the ground. Da'erba carried his master on his back and went down the mountain in big strides.

Yang Guo alone used his sword to defeat six Mongolian masters. The numerous warriors saw their six leading people either defeated or wounded, they dared not to attack. Instead they picked up Xiaoxiang Zi and Yin Kexi and quickly ran away, leaving no trace.

Ma Guangzuo, with his head still dripping blood, walked over to Yang Guo, waving fingers at him and saying: "Xiao Xiong

Di [Little Apprentice Brother], you are really good!" Yang Guo said: "Ma Da Ge [Big Brother Ma], these people you run around with are not a good kind. If you mix up with them, you will definitely suffer. It would be better to say goodbye to the Mongolian prince and go back to your native land!" Ma Guangzuo said: "You are right, Xiao Xiong Di [Little Apprentice Brother]." He looked at Xiao Longnu, seeing that although heavily injured, she was still full of grace and beauty. He struggled to find sweet words, asking: "When do you and the bride get married? I'm waiting to drink your celebration wine, is that good?" When he first met Xiao Longnu at the Passionless Valley, he saw her as a bride and from then on he always called her the bride.

Yang Guo forced a smile and shook his head. He then rounded up several hundred Taoist priests. Ma Guangzuo said: "Oh, there are still these many stinky priests to be taken care of. I'll help you." Yang Guo thought: "If fighting one on one, not even one of these priests is my rival. But if they together close in on me, circumstances will be terribly dangerous. It's not worthwhile to let him die in vain with me." So he said loudly: "You'd better be off quickly. I alone can handle this." Ma Guangzuo now understood, applauding: "Right, that's right! With all those big priests, not one could defeat you. What's with all these stinky little priests? Xiao Xiong Di [Little Apprentice Brother], the bride, I'm leaving!" Dragging his copper rod and laughing merrily, he turned and left, only the sound of his copper rod bumping stones could be heard on his way down the mountain. And the sound gradually quieted.

Yang Guo propped his heavy sword on the ground. His fight with Fawang had used up a lot of his internal energy. He pondered: "Jinlun Fawang, Xiaoxiang Zi and others all worried about one another so they fought with me one on one in the hope to get rid of each other and leaving only himself at the end. I was benefiting as a third party in a

dispute. Had those six people together attacked me, it would have been very difficult to withstand. Let alone the fact that I competed with internal energy with Jinlun Fawang. I was certainly going to lose but fortunately Gu Gu [Xiao Longnu] pulled out a golden needle so I could win by luck. These Quanzhen priests' minds and bodies fight as one, all obeying their five masters' commands. Although the Taoist group's martial skills can't match those of Fawang and others, numerous wills build a city. Their combined power really was much stronger than Fawang and the gang. Anyway, Gu Gu and I are already together here. We fight until we have no strength left, then we two will die together."

Qiu Chuji said in a clear voice: "Yang Guo, so your martial skills have reached this stage; our generation is much, much inferior. But our sect has several hundred people; do you think you can break through our blockade by yourself?"

Yang Guo looked out into the distance, seeing four swords glinting. Every seven priests formed a row, tightly encircling himself and Xiao Longnu. The priests using this "Seven Man Circle" martial skill all united their swords and formed a first-class defense. This time the force around him was an equivalent of having tens of sword masters surrounding them from all sides.

Yang Guo had earlier disregarded life and death so he snorted and moved forward one step. Seven priests were holding their swords out to block him. Yang Guo thrust his sword out and seven swords simultaneously dashed out to counterstrike. A 'qiang' sound was heard as the seven swords were all broken and the seven priests holding the rest of their broken swords were quickly leaping aside.

The power Yang Guo sent out from his sword was this incredible. Although Qiu Chuji and others had for a long time fought powerful enemies, they had never seen anything like

this. Wang Chuyi called out: "Xuan Ji "Jade Pearl" formation followed by Yao Guang "Moving Light Strike!" Yang Guo thought that he would pay no attention to the Quanzhen master's big and small orders and rely on the power of sword thrusts to rush outside. He was carrying Xiao Longnu and moving two steps forward, and then he saw another seven priests circling and blocking his way so he immediately wielded his sword. This seven- priest formation did not seek to counterstrike but the priests appeared like a curtain, crisscrossing and changing their positions. He swept past them; two of them cried out -- one had an injured waist, the other a broken leg -- they collapsed on the ground.

But this time fourteen long swords were pointed at Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu's backs, seven for Yang Guo and seven for Xiao Longnu. If Yang Guo turned back to strike, he would be able to knock down the fourteen swords but Xiao Longnu would also be injured. At his slight hesitation, another seven swords pointed at Xiao Longnu's right side. At this point, he couldn't even sacrifice himself and also didn't have a way to rescue Xiao Longnu.

Qiu Chuji lifted his hand and shouted: "Hold!" The lights emitting from the twenty-one long swords glittered. Every sword pointed a few inches away from the couple, then stayed very still. Qiu Chuji said: "Long Guniang [Miss Long], Yang Guo, our respective honored founders shared a long, long history. We, the Quanzhen sect, have today won by numbers, which was not a glorious thing, and Long Guniang [Miss Long] had already been severely wounded. Wrongs should be righted by untying the problem, not by making it more complicated. You two please go. No matter who did or didn't do something, let us wipe the slate clean today."

Yang Guo and Quanzhen sect's feud was already huge. In the early years, Sun Po Po [Grandma Sun] was killed by Hao Datong, who was remorseful and willing to give up his life to

make it right. This matter was also unresolved. Yang Guo came to Mount Zhongnan to search for Xiao Longnu and really didn't mean to battle with the Quanzhen sect. As he heard Qiu Chuji's speech, he was thinking: "Saving Gu Gu's life is important. If I fight with these little priests, regardless of victory or defeat, honor or disgrace, what good could come of it?" He was just about to say that he agreed, Xiao Longnu's eyes slowly scanning from left to right. In a low voice she asked: "Where's Yin Zhiping?"

Yin Zhiping's back was struck by a wheel and his chest was pierced by his sword. These were two fatal wounds, but he hadn't died yet. He was rescued by his apprentice brothers and taken to one side. His breathing was already heavy and his eyes were blurry. Then he heard a gentle voice asking: "Where's Yin Zhiping?" These four words were actually said lightly but to his ears they were like a thunder strike. Not knowing where he got the extra strength but he got up from the ground, waded through all the swords, and called out: "Long Guniang [Miss Long], I'm here!"

Xiao Longnu stared at him for a moment. Seeing his Taoist robe drenched with blood and his face ghostly pale, she couldn't help but feel her heart sinking. Her voice trembled: "Guo'er, this person has defiled me. Even if he recovers from his injuries, he still couldn't fight you. But he... but he gave up his life to save me... so you must not give him any more trouble. Such is my brutal fate." She decided that she had to say this. Even though it was in front of several hundred people, she spoke honestly out her grief.

Yin Zhiping heard her saying: "But he gave up his life to save me, you must not give him any more trouble. Such is my brutal fate." As these words went through his ears, he couldn't help feeling like his heart was being cut out. Out of his own dark desire, he had made a grave mistake. He revered her as if she was a goddess, yet he caused her a

lifetime of sadness. To die a hundred times over would still not be enough to redeem him. He cried out loudly: "Master, Four Martial Elders, this disciple's sin is atrocious. You and the others cannot bother Long Guniang [Miss Long] and Yang Guo." Having said that, he jumped up and plunged into the eight or nine long swords that the priests were holding in front of him. Many swords pierced through his body, killing him instantly.

This was an unforeseen incident. Many people had not anticipated it so they couldn't help crying out in alarm. The priests heard Xiao Longnu's words. Then they saw Yin Zhiping acknowledged the crime and committing suicide. It looked like he didn't adhere to the rule and despicably disgraced Xiao Longnu. The Quanzhen Five Masters were priests who strictly adhered to the Taoist rules. Thinking about the wrongs that were done, they all felt greatly ashamed. But when it came to an apology, they found it difficult to express.

Qiu Chuji glanced at his four apprentice brothers and then shouted: "Put down the swords!" Then only the 'qiang' sound could be heard. The priests had put their swords back into their sheaths, making a pathway.

End of Chapter 27.

Chapter 28 - Wedding Festivities

Translated by BeeDreamer



Xiao Longnu inserted the hairpin and put on the earrings and the jade bracelets on both wrists. Yang Guo had tears streaming down his face; he was overwhelmed by grief. He lifted the Phoenix crown up and walked over to put it on for her from behind. In the mirror, Xiao Longnu saw him lifting his sleeve to wipe away his tears. When he faced her again, his face appeared to be joyful.

Yang Guo wrapped his right empty sleeve around Xiao Longnu's waist to support her body and gently said: "Gu Gu, let's go!" Xiao Longnu gave him a sweet smile, softly saying: "This time I can die by your side. In my heart... in my heart I'm very happy." Then something came to her mind so she said: "Guo Da Xia [great hero Guo]'s daughter cut off your arm. She didn't mean you well. Later on who will take good care of you?" Her heart sank when she thought about this so she softly added: "You'll be lonely by yourself, you...won't have anyone to keep you company.."

Yang Guo saw her life about to extinguish, he was overwhelmed by grief. Suddenly he remembered something: "That day we were here at Mount Zhongnan, she asked me if I was willing to make her my wife. At that time I was so shocked I couldn't answer and that led to many miserable and catastrophic events afterwards. We don't have much time left; I have to let her know my heartfelt feelings." So he said it out loud: "What do I care if you are my master? What do I care about a reputation? We will just do as we please and damn people if they can't take it! In life or in death, neither of us will ever be sad again, nor will we be alone and lonely. From now on, you are not my master, you are not my Gu Gu [auntie], you are my wife!"

Xiao Longnu's heart was filled with joy. She gazed at his face and softly said: "Are you really speaking from your heart? Or are you just saying sweet words to make me happy?"

Yang Guo replied: "Of course this is what I feel in my heart. My arm got chopped off and you are feeling sorrier for me than I am for myself; when you come across any hardship, I feel just the same."

Xiao Longnu softly said: "That's right. In this world, except you and me caring for each other, there's no one else."

The several hundred Taoists at Chongyang Palace were students of spiritual ways who let go their previous lives to become priests. Suddenly hearing the two people speaking tender words of love and care, they found themselves in a difficult situation – the old priests were quite embarrassed while the young ones unavoidably felt their worldly desires stirred up. They looked at each other in dismay and some couldn't help blushing. The Sage of Tranquility Sun Bu'Er shouted: "You two get out of here quickly. Chongyang Palace is a holy place, you shouldn't be here talking improperly like this!"

Yang Guo turned a deaf ear and only gazed into Xiao Longnu's eyes. Then he said: "In those years the late master Chongyang and our Gu Mu sect's [the ancient tomb sect] Ancestor Grandma should have been married. We don't know what strange grudges broke them apart in the end. Today before him we'll bow to heaven and earth and become man and wife, letting our Ancestor Grandma vent her anger." He originally didn't think very highly of Wang Chongyang. But then he started learning from the work that Wang Chongyang left engraved at Gu Mu [the ancient tomb], and the more he practiced, the more he admired him. He even secretly felt like he was Wang Chongyang's successor in a way. Xiao Longnu let out a sigh and quietly said: "Guo'er, you are very good to me."

During those years Wang Chongyang and Lin Chaoying were deeply in love. Quanzhen's Five Masters all knew about it.

They respected their master for cutting all his emotional ties with a proverbial sword like a true hero; but when they thought about how the supreme martial arts master Lin Chaoying, whose beauty was unrivalled, locked herself up inside Gu Mu for the rest of her life, they all sighed. When Yang Guo brought up this matter, the young Taoists didn't understand while the old masters trembled in their hearts.

Sun Bu'Er shouted: "Our late master had great wisdom. He let go of the secular world and started our sect, cutting himself off from all worldly pains. How could an infant like you, who was born after his time, pry into his business? If you have the gall to be this outrageous and talk rubbish again, don't blame my heartless sword!" That day at the Da Sheng Guan heroes' banquet, Yang Guo rejected Sun Bu'Er's offered sword, embarrassing her at the scene. Even though she was a Taoist priestess, her mind was far less generous than Qiu Chuji, Wang Chuyi and others. She was the revered elder of the Quanzhen sect and was insulted by a youngster of her disciples' generation; she naturally took it to heart. Also being a woman living and practicing Taoism with a group of male Taoists, she became even stricter. As she heard Yang Guo's declaration, determining to bow to heaven and earth [get married] before the sacred portrait of her sect's founding master, her rising anger became difficult to suppress. Now seeing the Yang-Long couple totally ignoring her words, her sword immediately came out of its sheath with a 'shua' sound.

Yang Guo gave her a cold look and thought: "You, old priestess, by yourself, are surely not my match. But if I fought with you, the rest of the Quanzhen sect couldn't just stand by. But I have to marry Gu Gu immediately. If we don't do it right now and leave the Chongyang Palace and if by chance her injuries don't heal, won't I be giving her grief at her end? You scolded me for 'being outrageous.' Humph, I, Yang Guo, will show you outrageous. I already said we would be married

before the portrait of Founding Master Chongyang and I will do as I said." He scanned the area and saw only half of the Taoists holding a sword in their hands. He then said: "Sun Dao Zhang [Taoist Elder Sun], you are set on forcing us to leave, is that it?"

Sun Bu'Er sternly said: "Leave now! From now on, the ties between the Quanzhen sect and Gu Mu sect are completely severed. There will be no more connection between us for all eternity and it is best we not meet again!"

Yang Guo let out a deep sigh and shook his head. Then he turned around, walking two steps towards the small trail that led to Gu Mu and slowly putting the sword back onto his back. His right sleeve flared out while he used his left arm to support Xiao Longnu. He secretly channeled air into his abdomen. Suddenly he lifted his head towards the sky and gave out a roar so loud that it shook the tree branches in the woods. Hearing this ear-shattering roar, the Taoists were startled.

And even before he finished his roar, he let go of Xiao Longnu and leapt backwards. In a flash, his left hand sealed both ' "Returning Orthodox" (Hui Zong) and "Sustaining Waterway" (Zhi Gou) points on Sun Bu'Er's right wrist. As Xiao Longnu's body, now without support, was about to collapse, Yang Guo quickly dragged Sun Bu'Er along with him to prop Xiao Longnu's body back up. His jumping back and forth was lightning fast, like the movement of a fleeing rabbit. Before any of the Taoists had a chance to blink their eyes, Sun Bu'Er had already fallen into Yang Guo's clutches and nothing could be done about it. Qiu Chuji and Sun Bu'Er had long fought powerful enemies. In the beginning, they were guarding themselves against Yang Guo's swift attack but then they saw him put away his weapon and head out towards the small trail to the outside, with his only arm supporting Xiao Longnu. Naturally, they concluded that he'd

decided to give up. They hadn't expected that he would use his roar to distract the enemy and that his actions -- using his left hand to support Xiao Longnu instead of his shirt sleeve and putting away the sword -- were actually a strategy designed to fool them so he could capture Sun Bu'Er. Numerous Taoists shouted and raised their swords. But as Sun Bu'Er was held captive, nobody dared to move forward to attack.

Yang Guo said in a low voice: "Sun Dao Zhang [Taoist Elder Sun], I have made a great social blunder. Please turn around and keep us company during the ritual." While still holding Sun Bu'Er's wrist, he slowly led Xiao Longnu to the back of the hall of the Chongyang Palace. The Taoists followed them, their faces filled with anger, yet they didn't know what else to do.

The three of them entered the hall through a side door and walked along the winding corridor until they arrived at the back of the hall. Yang Guo turned around and in a clear voice he said: "Everybody please stand outside. You may not enter the hall, not even one step. We've already decided that we would sacrifice our lives. If we fight, Sun Dao Zhang [Taoist Elder Sun] and the two of us will have the same fate."

Wang Chuyi quietly said: "Qiu Shi Ge [Apprentice Brother Qiu], how do we handle this?" Qiu Chuji then replied: "Nothing for the moment, we'll wait for the right opportunity. It looks like he wouldn't dare to harm Sun Shi Mei [Apprentice Sister Sun]." These Quanzhen masters had roamed the martial world for their entire lives, their names are renowned. They hadn't expected that in their sunset years they would be controlled by a mere boy. They were undoubtedly angry but also couldn't help chuckling.

Yang Guo pulled out a prayer mat for Sun Bu'Er to sit down on and then said: "Pardon!" while sealing the "Big Spine" (Da

Chui) and "Divine Hall" (Shen Tang) pressure points on her back, which left her unable to walk. As he saw the Taoists standing outside as they were told, not daring to enter, he helped Xiao Longnu stand in front of the portrait of Wang Chongyang, shoulder-to-shoulder with him.

Before their eyes was a portrait of a Taoist holding a long sword and showing a graceful disposition. He wouldn't be more than thirty years old. On the side of the portrait were three words "The Living Dead." The writing was sparse but the man in the middle of the painting exuded a heroic air, his elegance unparalleled. When Yang Guo came to learn martial skills at the Chongyang Palace as a boy, he was familiar with this painting, knowing that this was a portrait of the founding master. But now he remembered quite vividly that there was also a portrait of Wang Chongyang at Gu Mu. Even though this one was a front portrait and the one at Gu Mu was a back view, the art strokes were no different so he said: "This painting was also done by our Ancestor Grandma." Xiao Longnu nodded, giving him a sweet smile and softly saying: "The two of us get married before the portrait of Master Chongyang but the picture was drawn by our Ancestor Grandma, this is really very good."

With his foot, Yang Guo placed two prayer mats side by side in front of the portrait and then said in a loud voice: "Disciple Yang Guo and the disciple named Long are here to marry in front of Founding Master Chongyang. At this place the Taoists of the Quanzhen sect all bear witness." Having said that, he knelt down on a prayer mat but saw Xiao Longnu still standing, not kneeling down, so he said: "We are bowing to heaven and earth right now, you also have to kneel down!" Xiao Longnu hesitated, her eyes red and her tears flowing. Yang Guo softly asked: "What's wrong? You don't like us to get married at this place?"

Xiao Longnu's voice broke: "No, it's not that!" She paused and then said: "I'm not pure and I'm also dying. Why should you... Why should you have to be this good to me?" Having said this, tears flooded down her cheeks.

Yang Guo got up again and used his sleeve to wipe away her tears. He smiled and said: "Why do you still not understand my heart?" Xiao Longnu lifted her head to look at him and he softly continued: "I really wish we two could live to be 100 years old so I could take good care of you and return your love and affection. But if I can't, if God should only give us one day, then for one day we'd be man and wife. Even if for only a few hours, then for a few hours we'd also be man and wife." Xiao Longnu saw the sincere expression on his face and the infinite affection in his eyes, her heart fluttered, not quite knowing how to cherish him the way he deserved. Her sorrowful face slowly revealed a dimply smile, her tears stopped, and her expression was that of boundless joy. Then she gracefully knelt down on the prayer mat.

Yang Guo then also knelt down. The two people bowed down before the portrait and thought: "Even though our lives have been miserable, we have a time like this now - we are really most fortunate. Even if the pains of the past should cut our lives short, it wouldn't be something to worry about at all." Both of them exchanged a smile and, on the prayer mats, lowered their heads.

In a low voice Yang Guo spoke his vow: "Disciple Yang Guo and the Disciple named Long truly love each other and forever will not change. Throughout our lives, we will be husband and wife."

Xiao Longnu also said in the same tone: "May Master bless us. Throughout our lives, let us be husband and wife."

Sun Bu'Er was sitting on a prayer mat. Even though her body couldn't move, she clearly heard everything the two people

said. She looked at them and then understood. Even though the two people's action was preposterous, it actually stemmed from their guileless nature. She couldn't help thinking back to the days when she was young and newly married to Ma Yu. Originally she was very angry but by the time the Yang-Long couple stood up, the expression on her face had already turned gentle.

Yang Guo thought: "This time the two of us have become man and wife. Even if I am to die right way, I have no regrets." As his original worry about the Taoists breaking in to stop them vanished, he turned to Xiao Longnu and joked: "I am a rebellious disciple of the Quanzhen sect. Throughout the martial world, they all knew about it. Now you are also a rebellious disciple."

Xiao Longnu said: "That's right. My master ordered me neither to accept a male disciple, nor to get married but I didn't comply. The many disasters that have fallen upon us were actually to pay for our crimes."

Yang Guo brightly said: "One must rebel to the end. Master Wang and our Ancestor Grandma were heroes, one hundred times greater than us, but they didn't dare to get married. If the two of them in the afterworld know, they can't say we were afraid to do it!"

Then this time there was a 'ka la' violent sound coming from the roof, tiles flying about and the rafter breaking. The force was astonishing. The roof actually cracked by the weight of a gigantic bell, which was falling straight down on the top of Sun Bu'Er's head...

As Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were boldly bowing to heaven and earth in the hall, the old and young Taoists of the Quanzhen sect couldn't suppress their anger. Liu Chuxuan pondered for a while and then came up with a plan. He bent down and whispered it into the ears of the other three

masters, Qiu Chuji, Wang Chuyi and Hao Datong. The three of them nodded again and again and then said something to a disciple at the door in a low voice. Taking advantage of the situation while the Yang-Long couple was kneeling down inside, they took down a heavy copper bell from in front of the hall, which weighed over a thousand catties. The four of them together would hold the bell, fly up to the top of the hall, and find the right location to smash it down with great force. The bell would make a big hole in the roof before falling down to where Sun Bu'Er was sitting below. With the four masters' martial skills, even though the bell was very heavy, it would drop down with less than inches of error, trapping Sun Bu'Er inside so Yang Guo couldn't harm her. As the many Taoists closed in on him, how would the two people be able to fight them off?

Seeing the gigantic bell dropping, Yang Guo instantly understood the ploy. He immediately drew out his black iron sword and sent out with it a thundering force. A 'dang' sound echoed as the sword tip made contact with the copper bell. Even though this bell weighed a thousand catties, the force from this sword was strangely fierce and hit the side of the bell. The bell was then bumped off course by a couple of feet. If dropped, Sun Bu'Er's body would be crushed beneath.

Liu Chuxuan and the other masters who were looking down through the hole at the top of the hall realized the situation and cried out in alarm, their hearts aching. Nobody could have expected that this boy's sword would have such a divine power. They now saw with their own eyes that Sun Bu'Er would be wretchedly crushed by the large bell, with flesh and blood splattering. Liu Chuxuan shut both eyes, not daring to look, but then heard Qiu Chuji calling out: "Many thanks for your mercy!" Liu Chuxuan then opened his eyes in surprise, only to see the large bell unexpectedly covering Sun Bu'Er's body. There was no trace of crushed limbs at the

side of the bell, and not even a part of her Taoist robe was seen.

As Yang Guo saw his sword pushing the bell off course, which would definitely violently kill Sun Bu'Er on the spot, he suddenly thought: "Today is our husband and wife's happy day, why bother taking someone's life? This old Taoist priestess only has a bad temperament and doesn't possess any real evil intent." Once thought, he acted. His right sleeve flared out, pushing the prayer mat that Sun Bu'Er was sitting on and sending her right under the bell.

The Liu-Qiu-Wang-Hao four masters at the top of the hall were pleasantly surprised and thought of Yang Guo as enemy no longer. But the numerous disciples below had earlier received their orders. As soon as the large bell was dropped, they were to rush in to attack. Also as they were outside, they didn't see that the bell's supposed location was changed. Only hearing a loud noise and seeing dust flying, they all cried out and ran into the hall to attack with their long swords.

Yang Guo then put his black iron sword back onto his back. He used his arm to carry Xiao Longnu and leapt out the back of the palace hall.

Qiu Chuji called out: "Disciples, be careful. You may not take these two people's lives!" His voice was loud. Even among the noisy battle cries of hundreds of people, each person still heard it clearly. The numerous disciples ran out the back of the hall, their voices echoed: "Capture the treacherous scoundrel!" "The scoundrel violated our founding master's painting, don't let him go!" "Quick... Quick, they went out the eastern side!" "The great master ordered, don't take their lives!"

Before Liu Chuxuan jumped to the top of the hall, he had ordered twenty-one strong men to hide in the courtyard at

the back of the palace hall. Yang Guo was just about to open the screen door when he saw the sword reflections in the courtyard, and knew there were men waiting to block them. He thought: "It would be better to leap out through the hole in the roof of the hall. Although there are four big masters there, those people actually won't dare kill me." He carried Xiao Longnu and quickly leapt back inside.

Xiao Longnu held on to Yang Guo's neck with both hands and softly said: "Anyway, we are now married. Our ultimate wish in this world has been granted. If we get out, it's wonderful but if we don't, it still doesn't matter."

Yang Guo said: "You are right!" Then his right leg flew up, following quickly by his left leg. A 'peng' 'peng' sound followed as two priests were kicked out of the hall. Unlike the Cave of the Jade Void area which was much wider, the palace hall was packed with the Taoist priests, who now blocked them with the "Big Dipper Formation" [Bei Dou Zhen Fa]. Yang Guo's left arm was carrying Xiao Longnu so he could only use his legs to injure the enemy and couldn't break out of the heavy encirclement. He darkly thought: "These dumb Taoist priests can't spread a complete formation. If only I had my arm free, how would you be able to stop the two of us?" Then another 'peng' sound was heard as a priest was kicked, his body flying out and crashing into two other priests.

In between this chaos, an old man with white beard and hair suddenly ran into the palace hall. Trailing behind him was a swarm of honeybees. It was the Old Urchin Zhou Botong. When he first arrived behind the palace hall, the disciples there didn't pay him any attention, but then the honeybees that followed him started to sting. These bees were not just any ordinary honeybees but indeed were the Jade Bees that Xiao Longnu kept and tamed at the Ancient Tomb. The Quanzhen Taoists who were stung immediately felt the itchy pain that was difficult to endure. Some couldn't bear it and

rolled down on the ground, crying out. This of course added another commotion to the situation.

Zhou Botong was originally on his way to Xiangyang city to help Guo Jing; but then he stole Xiao Longnu's Jade Bee honey. Afraid to run into her, he decided not to go to Xiangyang but instead came to Mount Zhongnan to find Zhao Zhijing and to investigate how come he dared to plot his Martial Grandpa's [Master of Masters] death. Along the way he played with the Jade Bee honey and mulled over ways to direct the bees. Playing with the common bees on the road was easy but once he reached Mount Zhongnan, suddenly it all became a disaster. The Jade Bees on the mountain sensed the smell of the Jade Bee honey, many of them buzzed out. Since the Jade Bees were used to Xiao Longnu's hand signals and whistles, Zhou Botong naturally couldn't direct them and also couldn't drive them away. And more than that, they wouldn't let him rest. The Old Urchin saw the situation was not very funny so he speedily ran to the Chongyang Palace, thinking to find a place to avoid the bees. It just so happened that there was also a commotion at the palace, and actually much noisier.

Seeing Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo in the palace hall, Zhou Botong was delightedly surprised. He quickly threw Xiao Longnu the Jade Bee honey and called out: "Can't soothe them anymore. I can't deal with these grandparents of bees. Good Guniang [good Miss] quickly come and save my life." Yang Guo's shirt sleeve flared out, catching the bottle. Xiao Longnu let out a small smile and stretched her hand out to take it.

By now the palace hall was filled with buzzing bees. Qiu Chuji and others jumped down to greet and kowtow to their Martial Uncle. Hao Datong shouted out: "Quickly go get torches!" Some of the many disciples were covering their

faces with shirt sleeves while others were wielding their sword to strike the bees. Several went to get torches as told.

Zhou Botong paid no attention to Qiu Chuji and others. The Jade Bees had stung him twice on his forehead, which was now swollen with two big lumps. Right now he only wanted to find a secure hiding place where a bee couldn't sneak in. Seeing a large bell on the floor, his heart was filled with delight. He quickly used his energy to lift it up, only to see that there was someone inside. He didn't even look to see who that was, saying: "Excuse me. Excuse me. Let me get in." He pushed Sun Bu'Er out and let himself in. Then he released his hands and a 'teng' sound was heard as the heavy bell fell back down. He was very pleased with himself and thought: "No matter how you thousands and thousands of bees pursue, you can't sting me, the Old Urchin, anymore!"

Yang Guo said in a low voice: "You direct the bees to form a swarm then we can break out of here." Xiao Longnu was now Yang Guo's wife. Hearing his words had an authoritative tone, she felt sweetly comfortable in her heart and thought: "This is good. At last, he doesn't think of me as his master anymore but really as his wife." So she immediately said "All right!" in a soft and obedient tone. Then she lifted the honey bottle, waved it a few times, and whistled repeatedly. The Jade Bees flew back to their keeper and formed a swarm but Xiao Longnu continuously waved her hand and whistled. The large swarm of Jade Bees broke into two rows, one making way in the front and the other guarding the back, so the Yang-Long couple could find their way out.

Qiu Chuji and others were pleasantly surprised by Zhou Botong's visit and found it very funny. Seeing that the Yang-Long couple had retreated to the back of the palace hall, they ordered their disciples not to pursue. Wang Chuyi unsealed Sun Bu'Er's pressure points while Qiu Chuji went

over to lift the large bell. Zhou Botong, hiding inside the bell, didn't know the situation outside. Suddenly he felt that someone outside was lifting it up, he cried out loudly: "Can't soothe them anymore!" His arms stretched out, pushing the side of the bell and shouting: "Come down!" Qiu Chuji couldn't match Zhou Botong's profound internal energy. A 'dang' sound was heard as the bell, which was already half a foot from the floor, came down once again. Qiu Chuji laughed and then said: "Zhou Shi Shu [Martial Uncle Zhou] is joking again. Come. We all will fight with him!"

So Qiu Chuji, Wang Chuyi, Liu Chuxuan and Hao Datong each held out a hand and pushed against the outside of the bell. Qiu Chuji shouted: "Lift!" Between the four great forces the bell was raised three feet from the floor but the underside of the bell was empty, not even a shadow inside, and nobody knew where Zhou Botong had disappeared to. The four people cried out 'Ah!' in surprise. Suddenly a shadow flashed and Zhou Botong was standing beside the bell, laughing his head off. This was because Zhou Botong had glued his hands and feet to the inside of the heavy bell so when it was lifted, people outside naturally couldn't see him.

Qiu Chuji and the others stepped forward to kowtow to him. Zhou Botong frantically waved his hand, calling out: "Enough, enough. No more kowtows, you good boys get up!" By now Qiu Chuji and the others already had white beards and hair but Zhou Botong still called them 'Good boys.'

Many people were about to start small talk when Zhou Botong caught a glimpse of Zhao Zhijing slyly sneaking off. He gave out a loud shout, jumped forward to hold him, and scolded: "You cow-nosed thief, still thinking to run away?" His left hand shot out towards the large bell and lifted it, two feet from the ground, while the right hand tossed Zhao Zhijing underneath. Then he let loose his left hand and the large bell came down, all the while repeatedly scolding: "Cow-nosed

thief, cow-nosed thief." At this time in the palace hall, except for him, everybody else was a Taoist. His loud scolding "Cow-nosed thief" was the same as scolding all Wang Chongyang's disciples and followers. Qiu Chuji and the others knew their Martial Uncle's temper and did not think to disobey. They couldn't help but smile at each other.

Wang Chuyi asked: "Shi Shu [Martial Uncle], what did Zhao Zhijing do to offend the Old Master? This disciple will definitely punish him heavily."

Zhou Botong said: "Hey, hey, this little cow-nosed thief led me to steal a flag that was put in a cave but before that he hid these very big colorful most deadly poisonous spiders there,. Luckily that small Miss, hmm, where's that small Miss? Where are all the bees?" He talked without order and Wang Chuyi couldn't quite understand yet but then saw him look around trying to find Xiao Longnu.

At this time ten disciples rushed in and reported that the Yang-Long couple had retreated to the Sacred Scripture Chamber on the back side of the mountain. The following disciples didn't dare to use torches to fight off the bees for fear that they might burn the Taoist scriptures. Qiu Chuji and others were startled. The Sacred Scripture Chamber was the Quanzhen Sect's sacred place as it stored the Taoist scriptures of the past dynasties and the work of Wang Chongyang and his seven disciples. There were several secret documents of the sect hidden there. If something happened, it would be a great loss. Qiu Chuji said: "We'll go and take a look. Yang Guo has shown mercy and spared Sun Shi Mei [Apprentice Sister Sun]. We could definitely turn an enemy into a friend."

Sun Bu'Er said: "You are right!" Then everybody rushed out to the Sacred Scripture Chamber at the back of the mountain.

At the door Wang Chuyi saw Zhao Zhijing trapped inside the bell, he thought: "Zhou Shi Shu's [Martial Uncle Zhou] affairs are quite silly. This matter might not necessarily be Zhao Zhijing's fault. We'll investigate this in details when we come back." For fear that there would be no air inside the bell and Zhao Zhijing would be suffocated to death, he used his energy to lift the bell up a few inches, kicked up a brick, and placed it under the bell. He left the crack a few inches wide so air could ventilate it and then went out to catch up with other people.

In front of the sacred scripture chamber, several hundred disciples were shouting loudly but nobody dared to go upstairs. In a loud and clear voice, Qiu Chuji called out: "The Yang-Long couple, we'll let bygones be bygones. How about we stop fighting and become friends?" He waited for a while and no sound from the chamber could be heard. Qiu Chuji said again: "Long Guniang [Miss Long] has been injured. Please come out and we'll try to treat the injury together. Our sect's disciples won't dare to be disrespectful to the two of you. Qiu Chuji roamed Jiang Hu for several decades and has never broken a promise to anyone." Half a day passed and there was still no sound.

Liu Chuxuan pondered the situation and said: "They are already gone!" Qiu Chuji asked: "How?" Liu Chuxuan said: "Look at the bees. They are flying scattered." He took a torch from one of the disciples and rushed inside the chamber.

Qiu Chuji and the others stepped into the chamber but only saw the four walls of books and not a single person. There was also that bottle of Jade Bee honey on the writing desk. As if he had found a treasure, Zhou Botong snatched it and put it away in his chest. Many people turned the chamber upside down but didn't find any books missing. They only saw a pile of books on the floor and the wooden chest that used to house them was nowhere to be seen. Suddenly Hao Datong

called out: "They left from here!" The people followed Hao Datong's voice to the window in the back of the chamber and saw a rope tied to a wooden pole, with its other end tied to a tree on the cliff on the opposite side. Between the Sacred Scripture Chamber and the cliff was a deep ravine, with no way to pass through it. They didn't expect that Yang Guo would actually have such lightness Kung Fu and could carry Xiao Longnu and also across the valley on a rope.

As Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu bowed to heaven and earth at the Chongyang Palace, everybody in the Quanzhen sect felt badly violated. But this time seeing how the two people had retreated, the Quanzhen Five Masters smiled at one another and actually turned soft in their hearts. Sun Bu'Er was originally the most resentful but at the palace hall she witnessed how the two of them were idealistic and sincere. On top of that, Yang Guo had spared her own life at a critical moment. She couldn't help feeling a loss and fell silent.

The Quanzhen five masters and Zhou Botong went back to the palace hall and inquired about the Mongolian Prince's imperial decrees, the fights of the two disciples Zhao and Yin, Xiao Longnu's sudden attack, and so on. They went over each report one by one. With tears in his eyes, Qiu Chuji said: "Zhibing's disgracing someone was truly abominable but he did defend our sect with loyalty and patriotism, pledging to fight to death rather than surrendering to the Mongols. That has great merit."

Wang Chuyi said: "Zhibing naturally had flaws but he also tried to uphold justice. We should still recognize him as a Zhang Jiao [Jiao chief]." Liu Chuxuan, Hao Datong, and others also agreed.

Qiu Chuji said again: "If it was not for Long Guniang [Miss Long] arriving in time to block the enemy, our sect would have been annihilated. Long Guniang is really our sect's

great benefactor. From now on we not only cannot be disrespectful to them as husband and wife, we would also have to repay the debt of gratitude. Ai, we did injure her, not knowing... not knowing..." Thinking about how Xiao Longnu was heavily injured, he deeply blamed himself.

Qiu Chuji and the others were busy investigating the past events and cleaning up damage while Zhou Botong didn't pay attention to these matters in the slightest, he was playing with that bottle of Jade Bee honey in his hand. Several times he thought about opening the bottle to tempt the bees but always feared the outcome, and of not being able to get away. At this time a disciple stepped in and reported that five disciples were stung by the Jade Bees and that their itchy pains were difficult to endure and so asked the master to help. Hao Datong thought about the year Sun Po Po (Grandma Sun) broke into the palace to give them the honey so he said: "Long Guniang [Miss Long] must have left this bottle of Jade Bee honey for us to treat the injured. Shi Shu [Martial Uncle], please give the Jade Bee honey to the five disciples, and let them take a little."

Zhou Botong stretched out both hands and his palms were empty. He said, "Don't know how but I suddenly can't find it." Hao Datong had obviously seen him playing with the bottle in his hand so it couldn't possibly be suddenly missing. He decided that Zhou Botong was not willing to hand it over but Zhou Botong was an elder so it was not very convenient to say much.

He couldn't help but feel awkward. Zhou Botong then gave his sleeves a brush and patted his body several times. He said, "I didn't hide it. Don't suspect me being so mean that I don't want to give it to you. Do you want me to take off all my clothes for you to take a good look?" Zhou Botong had always been naughty and only wanted to play, not distinguishing between big, small or urgent matters, and this

didn't change with old age. In his mind, these little cow noses [Taoists] were stung by the bees. At most they would be in immense pain for half a day so it was hardly a life or death worry.

This bottle of Jade Bee honey couldn't be given to anyone. Then he heard Hao Datong speaking so he passed the bottle up his shirt sleeve and let it slide down from his chest to his belly. He shrank his belly a bit so the bottle could go down his pants and from there the bottle slowly dropped to his foot and gently fell down to the floor. His internal energy was so profound that the muscles in his whole body could all be manipulated. That small bottle was sent to the floor and surprisingly didn't even make a sound.

Wang Chuyi thought, "Martial Uncle didn't want to hand over the bottle but only wanted to play with people. If I say something, there is no way I could change his mind. I should just take care of other business first and when his temper is improved, I will get the bottle from him. For now let's heavily punish the treacherous disciple Zhijing. If not for Zhao Zhibing's willingness to die rather than to surrender, wouldn't our sect's long-built reputation have already been destroyed by this treacherous disciple's hand?" Having thought this, he said out loud, "Hao Shi Di [Apprentice Brother Hao], it won't hurt if we postpone the matter of treating the injured. We must quickly deal with this treacherous disciple Zhijing first!"

The Quanzhen five masters were apprentice brothers for several decades so they all knew about Wang Chuyi's straight and unselfish character. Even though Zhijing was his Taoist disciple, he had committed an atrocious crime. Wang Chuyi wouldn't think to protect him. Everybody thought, "This perfidious disciple sold out his sect for personal glory and harmed his own sect brothers in the process. He cannot be forgiven."

Suddenly they heard a faint sound coming from under the bell, "Martial Grandpa Zhou, if you save my life, I'll give you the bee honey; otherwise I'll just eat it all before I die!" Zhou Botong was alarmed and quickly moved forward a step. Sure enough that bottle of Jade Bee honey was gone without a trace. Zhou Botong had earlier stood by the bell, with Zhao Zhijing beneath it. That small bottle happened to fall right in front of him. Upon hearing that Hao Datong couldn't get the Jade Bee honey from Zhou Botong, he immediately stretched out his hand through the crack and grabbed it.

Now he used this small bottle to bargain for his life. He himself knew that this attempt could be in vain but he was desperate and therefore must fight for his life to the bitter end. As Zhou Botong heard Zhao Zhijing's words, he was extremely worried and cried out, "Hey, hey, you definitely can't eat the bee honey. Wait, let's talk about it."

Zhao Zhijing then replied: "Then you must agree to save my life."

The Quanzhen five masters were startled, fearing that if this Martial Uncle were to agree to this demand, they wouldn't be able to punish Zhao Zhijing. Qiu Chuji hurriedly said, "Shi Shu [Martial Uncle], this person has committed a really heinous crime, we cannot spare him no matter what."

Zhou Botong crouched down on the ground and spoke into the bell, "Hey, hey, you definitely cannot eat the bee honey!"

Liu Chuxuan then added, "Shi Shu [Martial Uncle], pay him no mind! If you want the bee honey, it's really not difficult. Today we've already explained and settled the animosity with Long Guniang. We can now go to Gu Mu and ask her for several bottles. Long Guniang has already given you the first one so giving you another ten is really not a problem!"

Zhou Botong then shook his head and said, "Maybe not, maybe not!" In his mind he thought, "Do you think she gave me this bottle of the bee honey? It was me who stole it. She left the Sacred Scripture Chamber in a hurry so she didn't take it with her. If I asked her again to give me the honey, she might not agree. And even if she did agree, I'd still have to let you take it away to cure people, how would there be anything left for me in the end?"

Then he heard the gentle hum of five or six Jade Bees that flew into the hall from the courtyard through the hole in the roof. The hall doors were closed so the bees hit the window and couldn't find their way out. Zhou Botong came up with an idea and said, "Zhao Zhijing, I'm afraid what you took isn't the Jade Bee honey."

Zhao Zhijing hurriedly replied, "Yes, yes, it is. Why shouldn't it be?"

Zhou Botong then said, "Good, you open the bottle and let me smell it first. If it isn't the bee honey, there's no need to talk any more nonsense."

Zhao Zhijing quickly opened the bottle and said, "You smell it, isn't it the bee honey?"

Zhou Botong deeply inhaled the air and said, "Hmm, Hmm, it doesn't smell like it. Let me sniff again a few more times."

Zhao Zhijing clasped both hands tightly over the bottle for fear that Zhou Botong would lift the bell up and snatch it from him. At the same time he said, "You sniff this sweet scent, sniff this sweet scent!" The scent of the Jade Bee honey was incomparably sweet. As soon as the bottle was opened, the palace hall was filled with the strong fragrance.

Zhou Botong sneezed and laughed. He said, "I've got a cold and my nose is not very effective!" and at the same time

turned to Qiu Chuji, giving him a wink.

Zhao Zhijing also guessed right that Zhou Botong was using a delaying tactic so he said: "If you even touch the bell, I will eat all the bee honey." But by this time, several Jade Bees had already sensed the honey smell and flew to the bell.

Zhou Botong wielded his sleeves and shouted, "Go in and sting him!" The Jade Bees of course didn't listen to Zhou Botong but the scent coming out from beneath the bell was growing more and more intense. With zeng-zeng hums, they all buzzed in through the crack at the bottom of the bell.

The people then heard Zhao Zhijing's frantic shouts. With the poignant smell of the honey, a Jade Bee flew in and stung him, causing the bottle to drop and shatter. Zhou Botong went mad and shouted, "Stinky Cow nose [Taoist], why couldn't you hold the bottle firmly?" As he was about to go lift up the bell more Jade Bees from the courtyard crazily buzzed into the bell. Zhou Botong had suffered the Jade Bee stings so he didn't dare to get near. He saw numerous bees filling the large space inside the bell. Zhao Zhijing's body was covered with the sticky syrup and no matter how he moved his hands or his head, he couldn't avoid the bees and got stung who-know-how-many hundred times all over his body. The people heard him shouting out crazily for a moment and then came an eerie silence. He must have died from the great amount of poison.

Zhou Botong then grabbed Liu Chuxuan's robe and said: "Good, Chuxuan, now you go ask Long Guniang to give me many, many bottles of the bee honey." Liu Chuxuan frowned, feeling quite miserable. Earlier he tried to stop Zhou Botong from being rash and agreeing to Zhao Zhijing's demand so he spoke out quite carelessly. As a matter of fact, the Quanzhen Five Masters had used the "Big Dipper Formation" and all their combined forces to injure Xiao Longnu. It was

still not certain that she would ever recover, how could it be "animosity explained and settled" four words as he said? Right now Zhou Botong was holding his chest so he could only let out a painful smile and said: "Don't worry, Shi Shu [Martial Uncle], Chuxuan is leaving!" Then he turned towards the back of the mountain and walked to Gu Mu.

Qiu Chuji and others knew that this matter was indeed deadly. If Xiao Longnu was alright, everything would be fine. But if she died from the severe injury, nobody knew how many Quanzhen disciples would be killed by Yang Guo's hand. Everybody then said in one voice: "Let us all go together."

The woods outside Gu Mu was the area Wang Chongyang himself had forbidden his disciples to go, not even one step. Many people heeded their late master's instruction so they stopped at the edge of the woods. Qiu Chuji summoned air into his abdomen and clearly announced: "Yang Xiao Xia [Young Hero Yang], is Long Guniang's injury alright? Here we've got several wonder pills to treat the injury. Please come out and take them." Zhou Botong said in a low voice: "Yes, Yes! I want the bee honey. Come out and trade for them!" Half a day passed and still there was no reply. After Qiu Chuji used his energy to call the couple, the woods fell into a bleak silence. He looked into the woods but only saw the shady clouds circling around, all the tree branches above, and thorny bushes below.

Liu Chuxuan and Hao Datong walked along the edge of the woods but saw no sign of people passing through the area. It looked like Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu didn't come back to Gu Mu but went away from Mount Zhongnan. They felt both happy and worried at the same time and decided to return to the Chongyang Palace. The Quanzhen people were glad that the Yang-Long couple had gone far away but worried that if Xiao Longnu didn't recover, the sect would have big trouble

ahead. On the other hand, the Old Urchin Zhou Botong was worried that he wouldn't get the Jade Bee honey but also quite happy that he didn't have to meet Xiao Longnu and could avoid exposing his crime of stealing the bee honey in the first place.

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Even though the Quanzhen Five Masters had lived on Mount Zhongnan for several decades, they couldn't have guessed how Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu came back to Gu Mu.

Shielded by the Jade Bees, the Yang-Long couple rushed to the back of the courtyard and then saw a small building on the side of the mountain. Yang Guo knew it was the Sacred Scripture Chamber of the Chongyang Palace so he carried Xiao Longnu inside. They let out a gasp of air and then heard the sounds of many people shouting. Dozens of Taoists were pursuing them but they were afraid of the Jade Bees and dared not come too close.

Yang Guo settled Xiao Longnu in a chair, looked around, and contemplated the situation. Then he saw that in the back of the Sacred Scripture Chamber was a mountain creek which was 30 to 40 feet below. Even though the gorge was deep, the good thing was that it wasn't too wide. On the side of his body, he always carried a long rope for tying between two big trees to make a bed. Now he tied one end to a pillar of the Sacred Scripture Chamber and then leapt down while pulling the rope. He swam across the mountain stream and then straightened the rope. He then tied its other end to a big tree before using his lightness Kung Fu to walk on the rope back to the chamber.

When he was back at Xiao Longnu's side, he softly asked her, "Shall we go over there?"

Xiao Longnu said, "You said we should go there; then I'd go there with you."

Yang Guo laughed and said, "That is called 'Marry a chicken, act like a chicken; marry a dog, act like a dog!' [Chinese saying: A woman must follow and comply with her husband's wishes]. Then he paused and asked again, "In your heart, do you really want to go over there?" Xiao Longnu let out a gentle sigh and her facial expression changed. Yang Guo knew she most wanted to go home to Gu Mu but they could only get inside at great expense. While hesitating, they heard the shouting from outside the chamber and knew that they couldn't delay getting out of there much longer.

While he could read her mind, Xiao Longnu also understood him just as well. So she softly said, "I don't really have to go back to Gu Mu. You don't have to worry about me." Then she smiled, "As long as I can be with you, any place is just as good."

Yang Guo now thought, "This is her first wish after we got married and it might be her last wish in life as well. If I couldn't do this for her, how would I deserve to be her husband?" He looked in all directions. Hearing the sounds of people outside, his heart was in chaos. Then towards the west side of the chamber he caught a glimpse of a wooden trunk stacked on a bookshelf. His heart leapt and he said, "That's it!" He rushed there and saw that the trunk had a copper lock on it. He ripped it apart and opened the lid. The inside of the trunk was filled with books so he lifted up the trunk and turned it upside down, sending the books down on the floor. The trunk itself was made from Camphor wood about an inch thick and was very sturdy. Then he traced his hand along the shelves and found an oilcloth that was used to protect the precious books from rain leaks. He put two pieces of large oilcloth inside the trunk and then, with a rope, dropped the trunk down to the mountain creek below. He

came back to carry Xiao Longnu and said with a smile, "Let us go home."

Xiao Longnu was very happy and smiled back. She said, "Your ideas are really good."

Yang Guo was afraid that she would worry so to comfort her he said, "This sword is very powerful. If a mountain rock blocks the trunk under the water, the sword will cut it open. I'll go fast; you, inside the box, don't have to worry."

Xiao Longnu smiled and said; "Only one thing is not good."

Yang Guo was startled and said, "What is it?"

Xiao Longnu then replied, "I won't be able to see you for a while."

Down at the mountain creek, Yang Guo remembered that he left Guo Xiang in the cave so he said, "We'll bring Uncle Guo's girl with us too, what do you say?"

Xiao Longnu was stunned and so her voice trembled as she said, "Really? You've brought Hero Guo...Hero Guo's daughter?"

Yang Guo saw her changed expression, immediately realizing that she thought he'd brought Guo Fu with him. He bent down and gently kissed her face, softly saying, "It is that month-old baby. She can't cut off anyone's arm!" This time Xiao Longnu blushed profusely and hid her face in Yang Guo's embrace, not daring to lift up her head.

After a while, she softly said, "We'd better go bring her back to the tomb with us. On a wild mountain like this, leaving her for another while could cost her small life."

Yang Guo then thought about how they were delayed at the Chongyang Palace until now, not knowing how Guo Xiang

was doing in the cave. Frightened, he immediately put Xiao Longnu in the trunk, carried it on his shoulder, and rushed out. As they reached the front of the cave but still didn't hear any crying sound, he got even more worried. He pulled out the thorns that he earlier piled in front of the cave entrance and saw that Guo Xiang was sleeping comfortably, her cheeks still red like they were painted with rouge. The two were overjoyed. Xiao Longnu stretched out her hand and said "Let me carry her." Yang Guo put Guo Xiang in her embrace and then put the wooden trunk back on his shoulder again.

By this time all the Taoists were gathering at the Chongyang Palace so they didn't run into anybody along the way. Passing a pumpkin field, Yang Guo picked six or seven pumpkins that the Taoists grew. He put them in the trunk and laughingly said, "This will be enough for us to eat for a week." And after a short while, they reached the bank of the mountain creek. He lowered his head to kiss Xiao Longnu's cheek and gently closed the trunk lid. He then wrapped it tightly with the two pieces of oilcloth. After putting the trunk under water, he breathed in deeply and dove away with the trunk behind him.

He had trained his internal power in a wild mountain flood so diving to the bottom of this small mountain creek didn't strain him in the least. The bottom of the creek was rugged with high and low terrain. There were muddy rocks blocking the waterway so the wooden trunk couldn't easily pass through. Yang Guo used his sword to hack them apart and make way. Afraid that Xiao Longnu would be suffocated inside the trunk, he went as fast as he could. In only minutes, they emerged from water, arriving at the underground tunnel below Gu Mu.

He pulled off the oilcloth and opened the trunk lid. Xiao Longnu was in a dazed state as a result of her heavy injury. Guo Xiang let out a loud healthy cry. She had been feeding

on leopard's milk for over a month so she was actually very strong and healthy. Xiao Longnu smiled faintly and softly said, "We are finally home!" She couldn't support herself by this time so she closed her eyes. Yang Guo didn't lift her body up but took the whole wooden trunk back to the living quarter inside Gu Mu.

Inside, the tables and chairs were overturned and the beds were crooked. This was the result of that day's evil fight with Li Mochou and her disciple before they departed. Yang Guo looked at the stone chamber and the many things he'd used since he was small; his heart felt something beyond description, a mix of happiness and pain. He was expressionless for a moment. Suddenly he felt a drop of water on the back of his hand so he turned his head and saw Xiao Longnu, supporting herself with a chair, standing there with tears slowly flowing from her eyes.

Today the couple had started their family. They finally fulfilled their long time wish and returned home. From now to the afterlife, the bitterness, agony, and worry were all gone but deep down in their hearts they couldn't restrain their sorrow. The two people both knew that Xiao Longnu was seriously injured. With the injuries from both Fawang's golden wheel and the Quanzhen Five Masters' strike, how would her delicate body be able to endure?

In their young lives, the two people had always been lonely and miserable and never really experienced true happiness. Suddenly they came to realize their biggest wish and then immediately had to say good-bye!

Yang Guo stayed expressionless for a long time. Then he went into Sun Po Po [Grandma Sun]'s bedroom and arranged the bedding on the chilled jade bed. Then he helped Xiao Longnu up so she could rest comfortably. All the old food that was stored at Gu Mu had long ago spoiled but the Jade Bee

honey at the altar indeed could not go bad. He poured out half a cup of the syrup and mixed it with fresh water. He fed it to Xiao Longnu and baby Guo Xiang. Then he himself drank a bowl of it.

Then he thought, "I've got to lift up my spirits to make her happy. Even my heart is filled with grief and sorrow; I can't let it show on my face." Having thought that, he went to look for two of the thickest candles and wrapped them with red cloth. He put them on a table and said with a smile, "This is our wedding party!"

With the two red candles, the stone chamber immediately became festive. Xiao Longnu was sitting on the bed. When she saw her own body stained with blood and dirt, she said with a small smile, "I look terrible like this, how would I resemble a bride!" Then she suddenly remembered something and said, "Guo'er, could you please go to Ancestor Grandma's bedroom and bring me that gold work box?"

Even though Yang Guo had lived inside Gu Mu for several years, he never dared enter Lin Chaoying's room or played with her stuff. This time he heard Xiao Longnu speaking to him like this, he said with a laugh, "You have to be this polite when you talk to your husband." He walked over to the headboard of the bed where several boxes were stacked and lifted out the one at the bottom. This box was really not heavy and had no lock. The outside work was red and gold with an exquisite design.

Xiao Longnu said, "Sun Po Po [Grandma Sun] told me that stored in this box were Ancestor Grandma's wedding items. She didn't get married and so these things didn't get used."

"Hmm," Yang Guo groaned. He looked at this beautifully designed box but felt that amid happiness always was infinite misery. He put down the box on top of the chilled jade bed and opened the lid to see that lying inside were a pearl-

inlaid Phoenix crown, a red robe embroidered in gold and female clothing made from red satin. All the items were made from the best materials and even though they had been in the box for several decades, they still looked like new. Xiao Longnu said, "Take them out and let me take a look."

Yang Guo took each item out of the box. Underneath the clothing were a small vanity box inlaid with pearl and gold and a carved jade jewelry box. There was rouge powder and half a bottle of scented oil inside the vanity box. And as soon as the jewelry box was opened, the two of them were wide-eyed, seeing a pearl hairpin, jade bracelets, and gemmed earrings. All items were exquisite, flashing and sparkling. The Yang-Long couple had rarely seen gem stones before so they didn't know how precious these adorning items were. They only saw the elegant inlay work and beautiful design, indicating that these pieces had been created with the most painstaking efforts.

Xiao Longnu said with a smile, "Should I dress up as a bride?" Yang Guo then replied, "Today you are exhausted. You should rest first and tomorrow you can dress up." Xiao Longnu shook her head, saying, "No, today is the day we got married. I love being a bride. On that day at the Passionless Valley, that Gongsun person wanted to marry me, I didn't get dressed up!"

Yang Guo said with a laugh, "You called that getting married? That was the senile Gongsun's delusion!"

Xiao Longnu picked up the rouge and the honey water. She looked into the mirror, planning to dress up. In her entire life, this would be the first time she put cosmetic powder on her face. Her facial complexion was originally pale and really didn't need any cosmetics. But this time she was seriously injured and had no color left on her face. She lightly smeared rouge on both cheeks and it added to her beauty

tremendously. She paused for a while and then picked up a comb to work on her hair. Then she sighed and said, "I have to make a hair bun but I can't do it. Guo'er, can you do it?"

Yang Guo then said, "No, I can't either! Without it, you are even more beautiful."

Xiao Longnu said with a smile, "Really?" and laid down the comb. She inserted the hairpin and put on the earrings and the jade bracelets on both wrists. Under the red candlelight, her beauty was unparalleled. She was overjoyed as she turned around, wanting to hear praise from Yang Guo.

As soon as she turned her head, she saw Yang Guo's tears streaming down his face. He was overwhelmed by grief. Xiao Longnu gritted her teeth and pretended not to see him crying. With a smile she said, "Would you say I look good?"

With a choking sound, Yang Guo replied, "Most beautiful! Let me bring you the Phoenix crown!" He lifted the crown up and walked over to put it on for her from behind. In the mirror, Xiao Longnu saw him lifting his sleeve to wipe away his tears. When he faced her again, his face appeared to be joyful. He then said with a smile, "Later, should I call you 'Niang Zi'[Madame] or should I still call you 'Gu Gu'?"

In her heart, Xiao Longnu thought, "Why 'later'? Is that to say the two of us still have a 'later'?" But she put on her happiest expression and laughingly said, "Calling me Gu Gu again is definitely not good. As for calling me 'Madame,' that sounds like an old lady!"

Yang Guo then said, "What were you called when you were a child? Today you can let me hear it."

Xiao Longnu replied, "I don't have a childhood name. Master just called me Long'er."

Yang Guo said: "Alright, then you call me Guo'er and I will call you Long'er. The two of us are equal and no one gets the worst of it. Wait till we have a baby, we will say: hey, baby's father! And hey, baby's mother! And when the baby is grown and gets married.. .."

Hearing him talking nonsense like this, Xiao Longnu could no longer grit her teeth to smile. Finally, her resistance broke and she let out a sobbing sound. She bent down on the box and started crying. Yang Guo scrambled forward and brought her into his arm. He softly said, "Long'er, you are not well, I'm also not well. There's no need to pay attention to whatever will happen in the future. Today you are not dead. I'm also not dead. The two of us should be very happy now. Nobody is allowed to think about tomorrow." Xiao Longnu lifted her head and smiled with tears in her eyes. Then she nodded.

Yang Guo said, "Look at this beautiful dress with a Phoenix design, I'll help you put it on!" He supported her body and put on the dress embroidered in red and gold for her. Xiao Longnu's tears dried up and she repaired her rouge make-up while sitting by the red candles with a smile.

At this time baby Guo Xiang was sleeping by the head of the bed. Then she opened her small eyes with great curiosity. It seemed like in her tiny heart she felt that the dressed up Xiao Longnu was really very pretty.

Xiao Longnu said, "I've dressed up nicely. It's a pity there is no bridegroom's outfit in the trunk. You must feel slightly out of place."

Yang Guo then said "Let me take a look again. It seems like there are some more pretty items in there." As he said that, he moved various scattered items out of the trunk and put them on the bed. Xiao Longnu saw him taking out a gold flower so she stuck it into his hair. Yang Guo said with a smile, "Not bad, there is a little more." Then he looked at the

bottom of the trunk and found a pack of letters bound by a red ribbon. The ribbon color already faded and the envelopes were so old they turned deep yellow. Yang Guo picked them up and said, "There are letters in here."

Xiao Longnu said, "Let's see what kind of letters they are."

Yang Guo then untied the ribbon and saw that on the envelopes was written "To be opened only by Miss Lin Chaoying" and that there were the words 'Ji Ji' on the left corner. All the twenty letters were addressed in the same way. Yang Guo knew that Wang Chongyang's given name before becoming a Taoist was Wang 'Ji Ji' so he laughed and said, "These are love letters Founding Master Chongyang wrote to our Ancestor Grandma. Can we read them?"

Since childhood, Xiao Longnu had revered her Ancestor Grandma as if she was a divine being so she quickly said, "No, we cannot read!"

Still smiling, Yang Guo tied up the bunch of letters with the ribbon and said, "Old sister Sun and the others were so old-fashioned. Seeing us bowing to heaven and earth before Founding Master Chongyang's portrait, they all got upset and accused us of committing a blasphemy. I didn't believe for a minute that in those years Master Chongyang and our Ancestor Grandma didn't have a relationship. If we took these letters there for them to take a look, those old cow noses' reactions would be quite interesting." While saying that, he was looking at Xiao Longnu and couldn't help feeling sorry for Lin Chaoying. He thought, "Ancestor Grandma lived alone inside Gu Mu. She must have more than once tried on the wedding dress. The two of us are much luckier than she was."

Then Xiao Longnu said, "That's right, we are more fortunate than Ancestor Grandma. Why should you still be unhappy?"

Yang Guo said, "All right!" Suddenly he was startled and said with a laugh, "I didn't say it but you really could guess what I was thinking."

Xiao Longnu curved her lips into a smile and retorted, "If I didn't know what you were thinking, how would I deserve to be your wife?" Yang Guo sat down on the side of the bed and gently extended his left arm to hug her. In their hearts, the two of them were happy beyond words and hoped that a moment like this would last forever. They sat there in each other's embrace and, for a long time, nobody said a word.

After a while, they both eyed that bunch of letters. And when they looked at each other, they laughed with mischievous glints in their eyes. Knowing perfectly well that they shouldn't read their deceased master's personal letters but, of course, they couldn't bear the curiosity in their hearts.

Yang Guo said, "We'll just read one letter. Is that alright? We definitely won't read more." With a smile Xiao Longnu said, "I want to read too. So, okay, we'll just read one." Delighted, Yang Guo reached out to get the letters and untied the ribbon. Xiao Longnu added, "But if the letter is filled with heartaches, you don't have to read it out loud to me." Yang Guo paused slightly and then said, "All right!" But in his heart he knew that the relationship between the Wang-Lin couple didn't end well and was afraid that there would be more misery than happiness in the letters. In that case, it would be better not to read them. Then Xiao Longnu said, "You don't have to worry about it beforehand. Perhaps there are only convoluted speeches in there."

Yang Guo picked up the first letter and read, "Dear Ying Mei [Sister Ying]: The other day my division and the enemy crossed swords at the Hill of the Evil Storm. We were ambushed and suffered a small loss. Four hundred men.. .." As he read on, the letter was filled with the story of the

battles between his army and the Jin. He looked through several other letters, they all talked about military affairs and there was nothing on personal relationships.

Yang Guo sighed and said, "Founding Master Chongyang was indeed a real Han hero. His whole heart was devoted to defending the country and since this was the case, our Ancestor Grandma couldn't be blamed for being estranged." Xiao Longnu said, "No, Ancestor Grandma was very delighted to receive these letters." Puzzled, Yang Guo asked, "How do you know?" Xiao Longnu said, "Of course I don't know. I can only guess what went on inside her mind. You see, every single letter talked about how very urgent and difficult those battle situations were but master Chongyang, even in distress, still didn't forget to write to our Ancestor Grandma. Wouldn't you say she was always on his mind?" Yang Guo nodded and said, "Yes, it was indeed so." And then he picked up the letter again.

That letter described a desperate situation. Wang Chongyang's army was overwhelmed by many enemies and they were repeatedly defeated with little hope of support. At the end of the letter, he asked about Lin Chaoying's injured condition and even though he used only a few words, his deep concerns were quite evident. Yang Guo said, "Hmm, during those years our Ancestor Grandma was injured but later she was well again. Your wound condition can slowly heal too. After a year or so, you can be recovered."

Xiao Longnu weakly smiled. She herself knew that her injury this time was far from normal. If an injury this heavy could be cured, that would be like having an immortal walking the earth. But to say it out loud right now wouldn't help light up the situation. Even if Yang Guo's suggestion couldn't convince her, it would make him feel better. So she said, "Slow treatment is good. What's the rush? And these letters don't really talk about private matters, you can read on!"

Yang Guo read another letter, which was filled with words of grief and anger. It talked about the army's defeat and how Wang Chongyang had to risk everything to break out of a heavy encirclement. But even his retreat was a disaster with ultimate deaths and casualties; at the end of the letter he said he was going to gather troops again for another battle. From that point on every letter all talked about military defeats and setbacks. The Jin power at the North river was very strong and Wang Chongyang obviously already knew that the matters were gravely serious. The letter was full of desperate and disheartening messages.

Yang Guo said, "These letters are very depressing. Let's not read anymore! Eh, what's this?" Suddenly there was excitement in his voice and the hand that held the letter slightly trembled. He read aloud, "There, at the most northern and bitterly cold area, is a stone called Chilled Jade [Han Yu]. It can control all illnesses and cure incurable diseases and should help my sister [Lin Chaoying]. Long'er, do you think this...this is the Chilled Jade Bed?"

As Xiao Longnu saw the happy expression on his face, her voice shook, "You... You said the Chilled Jade Bed could heal my injury?" Yang Guo replied, "I don't know but Master Chongyang said so. It must have a basis. You see, the Chilled Jade Bed was provided by him, wasn't it? Our Ancestor Grandma slept on this bed, didn't she? And her severe injury finally healed, right?"

He hurriedly unfolded every letter to look for a way to treat injuries but, apart from that one letter, the two words "Chilled Jade" were not mentioned again anywhere. Yang Guo finally tied up the many letters with the ribbon and put them back in the box. Blankly, he pondered, "This Chilled Jade Bed is this strange. There must be a reason. But how do I find out a way to treat Long'er's injury? Hmm, let me figure out the way... let me figure out the way...."

Xiao Longnu smiled and asked, "You look lost in thought, what's on your mind?"

Yang Guo then replied, "I'm trying to figure out a way to use the Chilled Jade Bed to treat your injury. Do I grind the stone for you to take as medicine or do I use any medicine to complement it somehow?" If he didn't know that the Chilled Jade Bed could treat all injuries, that would be the end of story but now that he'd read the six words "control all illnesses, cure incurable diseases" and couldn't figure out how to use the Chilled Jade Bed, his heart was on fire. Dismally Xiao Longnu said, "Do you remember Sun Po Po? She took care of both our Ancestor Grandma and my master for many years. Still when she was injured by the Taoist named Hao, she... she died of a severe injury." Originally Yang Guo was full of hope. Now hearing her words, he felt as if he was suddenly drenched with cold water.

Xiao Longnu stretched out her hand to stroke his hair gently. With a gentle voice she said, "Guo'er, you don't have to worry so much about my injury. Why should you put yourself through agony again?"

Yang Guo was completely disheartened but after a while, he asked, "How did my Shi Zu [Martial Grandma -referring to her master] get injured?" Even though Yang Guo had lived at Gu Mu for many years, he actually never heard Xiao Longnu talk about how her master passed away.

Xiao Longnu said, "My master isolated herself inside Gu Mu and rarely went outside. Then there was this one year my Shi Jie [apprentice sister] went out and caused trouble. She fled back to Mount Zhongnan so my master had to leave the tomb to help. Then unexpectedly she fell into an enemy trap. Even though my master lost the fight, she could still bring back Shi Jie. That should have been the end of it. But then she bickered with that evil person. Nobody would have

expected that he would want a yard after getting an inch. Shortly after the fight, he was outside Gu Mu, issuing a challenge, and then broke into the tomb. My master couldn't fend him off and almost had to drop the dragon stone to die together with him inside. Fortunately, at a critical moment, she threw out a golden needle. That evil person was caught off guard and got hit. The itchy pain was difficult to bear and my master used that opportunity to strike his pressure points. Seeing him unable to move, she didn't expect that Shi Jie would sneak up to unseal the pressure points. In the end that evil person attacked her and that was when she got struck by his poison hand."

Yang Guo asked, "Who was that evil person? His martial skills were even above my Martial Grandma. He must have been a high master of her generation."

Xiao Longnu said, "Master didn't tell me. She said that my heart shouldn't be filled with any love or hate feelings and that if she told me who that evil person was, I wouldn't forget him and would later go seek revenge."

Yang Guo sighed and said, "Hmmm, Shi Zu [Martial Grandma] was really a good person!"

Xiao Longnu smiled and said, "If master could see me today being married to a good son-in-law like this, she would be quite delighted."

With a laugh, Yang Guo said, "That might not be the case. She wouldn't let you marry anyone."

Xiao Longnu sighed, "My master was really the kindest. Even though at first she wouldn't allow it, afterwards, seeing my heart, she would have relented. She... she would certainly have liked you." Xiao Longnu was recalling her master's kindness and was lost in thought for a long time. Then she said, "After master was injured, she moved to another room

on the opposite side far away from the Chilled Jade Bed. She said our Gu Mu sect's martial style and cold air induced and subdued each other, therefore the Chilled Jade Bed wonderfully helped us practicing our martial skills. But after injury, we should not be exposed to the cold air."

Yang Guo made a "hmm" sound while pondering how internal energy circulated through vital organs. To use internal energy according to the Jade Maiden Manual, the pure Yin air would flow through body pulses, causing the inner body to be extremely cold and sending out heat steams to the outside of the body. When practicing, clothing had to be removed so the heat steams could be smoothly dispersed without any obstruction. And the internally injured could not use the cold air from the Chilled Jade Bed. He contemplated, "But what did Master Wang Chongyang mean by "control all illnesses, cure incurable diseases? This induce and subdue principle must be missing some important details." Then he saw Xiao Longnu's eyelids drooping, indicating that she was exhausted. He said, "You should rest, I'm sitting right here to keep you company."

Xiao Longnu quickly opened her eyes wide and said, "No, I'm not tired. Tonight, we won't sleep." With her heavy injury, she was afraid that once she slept, she wouldn't wake up again. Then she said, "You keep on talking to me. Hmm, are you tired?"

Yang Guo shook his head and said with a tiny smile, "You don't want to sleep then don't. Just close your eyes and keep your mind awake."

Xiao Longnu said, "All right!" She slowly closed her eyelids and said in a low voice, "My master once said, there was one thing that till the day she died she still couldn't figure out. Guo'er, you are very smart, you can think about it." Yang Guo said, "What is it?" Xiao Longnu then said, "Master hit that evil

person's pressure point but she didn't know why Shi Jie [Apprentice Sister] would help him unseal it." Yang Guo was deep in thought for a while and then felt Xiao Longnu's body resting against his. Her breaths were shallow. She already fell asleep.

Yang Guo gazed at her face, his heart filled with apprehension. Time passed. A candle flame flickered and then went out by itself.

He suddenly remembered a vertical couplet in a small room at the Peach Blossom Island:

"Silkworms will not stop spitting their threads until they die; the candle has burned to ashes when tears dry up."

Missing his wife, Huang Yaoshi wrote these two lines of a Tang poem and hung them outside the study where she used to embroider. At that time, Yang Guo saw them but paid no attention. He was just too young to understand. Now he slowly absorbed the true meaning of the lines and his heart was breaking. Suddenly before his eyes, another candle was flickering its last light. He thought, "These two candles are just like Long'er and I. One has burned out and the other is about to be extinguished."

He was deep in thought for a while and then heard Xiao Longnu quietly murmur, "I'm not going to die. Guo'er... I'm not going to die. The two of us will live for many, many, many years."

Yang Guo said, "That's right. You can't die. You'll slowly improve and then you'll be well. How does your chest feel?" Xiao Longnu didn't reply. She was just talking in her sleep.

Yang Guo stretched out his hand to brush her forehead but felt it was burning. He was both worried and sad. He thought, "Li Mochou did all kinds of evil things but she is now alive

and well. Long'er has never caused anyone harm. How come her life is cut short? Oh God, Oh God, you open your eyes but don't see?"

In his entire life, he was never a prisoner of fear and he always acted as he pleased. But right now, facing a hopeless situation, he couldn't do anything. He gently put Xiao Longnu's body to the side and knelt down on the ground. He secretly prayed, "So long as God has mercy and let her injured body recover, I will... I will..." To redeem Xiao Longnu's life, how would there be anything he was not willing to do?

While he was praying, Xiao Longnu suddenly said, "It was Ouyang Feng. Sun Po Po [Grandma Sun] said it was Ouyang Feng! Guo'er, Guo'er, where are you?" She called out in alarm and lifted her body up. Yang Guo quickly sat down by the bed, grabbed her hand, and said, "I'm here." In her sleep, Xiao Longnu felt her body without support so she immediately woke up. Seeing now that Yang Guo was still right by her and hadn't gone anywhere, she was greatly consoled.

Yang Guo said, "Don't worry. In this lifetime, I'll never leave you. And in the future, when we leave Gu Mu, I will never leave your side even for a bit."

Xiao Longnu said, "In the outside world, sure enough there are so many good places to go. But when we get outside, I'll still be afraid."

Yang Guo said, "Today we don't have to fear anything. We'll wait for a few months for your body to recover, and then we'll head south. I've heard that Lingnan [a place in South China] is warm like spring all year round. The flowers bloom and don't wither and the leaves always stay green. We'll put down our swords. We'll grow plants and raise small chickens and ducks. We'll live under the southern sun for the rest of

our lives and have many, many boys and girls. Do you think these are good ideas?"

Xiao Longnu daydreamed and gently said, "We'll put down our swords forever. That's wonderful! Nobody hurts us and we don't need to hurt others. We'll grow things on a farm and we'll keep chickens and ducks.. .. Oh, only if I don't die..."

For the moment, the two hearts flew to a far-away Southern place, which was blessed with spring breezes and morning sun. They could smell the rich flower fragrances and they could hear the sounds of small chickens clucking and ducks...

No longer being able to support her head, Xiao Longnu's mind was about to slip into a blur. But she was determined not to sleep so she said, "I don't want to sleep. You keep talking to me."

Yang Guo said, "Just now in your sleep you said something about Ouyang Feng. What was the matter?"

Xiao Longnu then said, "I said Ouyang Feng? What about him?"

Yang Guo added, "You also said Sun Po Po [Grandma Sun] decided that it was him."

As Xiao Longnu heard him saying that, she immediately recalled something and said, "Oh! Sun Po Po said the man who injured my master had to be West Poison Ouyang Feng. She said in the world there were only very few people who could have hurt my master. And Ouyang Feng was the only bad person among those people. Until her death, my master never said that evil person's name. Sun Po Po asked her 'Is it Ouyang Feng, is it Ouyang Feng?' but my master shook her head, smiled, and then passed away. Isn't that Ouyang Feng your adoptive father? His martial skills were really high; no wonder my master couldn't defeat him."

Yang Guo sighed and said, "My adoptive father has died. Martial Grandma and Sun Po Po have died. Master Chongyang and Ancestor Grandma have died. Hatred, love, and death were all written off by God. It was like my Martial Grandma could see the future so she was not willing to say my adoptive father's name..." But suddenly he shouted, "Oh...that must be it!"

Xiao Longnu asked, "What have you figured out?"

Yang Guo replied, "Li Mochou didn't unseal my adoptive father's pressure point that Martial Grandma hit. Actually, it was because Martial Grandma didn't hit the mark in the first place!"

Xiao Longnu said, "She didn't hit the mark? That was not possible. My master's accupoint sealing skill was really remarkable."

Yang Guo said, "My adoptive father had two of the world's strange martial skills. In his whole body, the vital energy could circulate against the normal flow. The opposite circulation shifted all his pressure points so sealing the pressure point actually meant missing the point."

Xiao Longnu said, "There is something that strange?"

Yang Guo said "Let me try it for you to see." Having said that, he flipped up-side down and used his hand to prop himself up on the floor, his head down and legs up in the air. Then he quickly spun himself, making a few rounds, and then breathed in a few times. Suddenly he jumped up and bumped his head into a pointed corner of the table in front of the bed. Xiao Longnu cried out, "Ai yo, be careful!" only to see the "Hundred Meetings" point [Bai Hui] on his head hit the corner of the stone table hard. This "Hundred Meetings" point was right on top of the brain, where the vertical line from the front to the back of the head and the horizontal line

from the left ear to the right ear intersect, and hence the name "hundred meetings point." This was a vital pressure point, which controlled all the veins. Doctors usually compared it to the North Star, as in the saying "Bai Hui [Hundred Meetings] is sky, Xuan Ji [Jade Pearl -chest] is man, and Yong Quan [Bubbling Spring -legs] is earth," which was to say that these "three big pressure points" were the most critical in a human body. Knowing this, Yang Guo bumped it right into a table corner and then turned around to stand erect. With a laugh he said, "You see, as the energy flew in the opposite direction, my Hundred Meetings point changed its position!" Xiao Longnu clucked her tongue in approval and said, "How very strange. And he came up with that!"

Hitting himself this time, even though Yang Guo didn't seal his pressure point, he used quite a bit of force and his brain couldn't help becoming confused. In his daze, he seemed to have figured out something important all of a sudden but couldn't quite say what it was. Xiao Longnu saw him looking dazed and disoriented so she said with a smile, "Dumb kid, a gentle demonstration would have been enough. Nobody told you to crash into the table so hard. Does it hurt?" Yang Guo didn't reply just waved his hand for her to stop talking. He concentrated on his thoughts but felt like there was a fuzzy shadow flashing in his brain, barring him from getting a clear picture. It seemed he needed to recall something from the past, yet it was also like he'd suddenly discovered something new. He wished he could have just taken it out from his brain, stopped that moving shadow, put that thought before his eyes and clearly look at it.

He thought for a while. Still he couldn't grasp the main points and couldn't give up thinking either. He grabbed his head. Quite vexed, he asked Xiao Longnu, "Long'er, I've figured out an extremely important matter but I don't know what. Do you know?" When a person got his thoughts mixed up like entangled threads and he himself didn't have a clue,

asking another person what he was thinking was quite ridiculous. But for the two of them who had lived together for a long time and understood each other very well, their guesses would be correct most of the times. Xiao Longnu said, "This is a very important matter?" Yang Guo replied, "Yes." Xiao Longnu asked, "Is it related to my injury? Delighted, Yang Guo said, "Good, very good! What matter is that? What have I figured out?"

With a chuckle, Xiao Longnu said, "You just talked about your adoptive father Ouyang Feng. You said he could direct vital energy to circulate in the opposite direction. Is this related to my injured condition? I'm not the person he injured..."

Yang Guo suddenly jumped up and shouted out loudly, "Got it!"

These two words "Got it!" were brightly loud. The doors of the stone chambers inside Gu Mu were not closed so each and every word spoken echoed back, "Got it, Got it..." Yang Guo grabbed Xiao Longnu's right arm and repeatedly cried out, "You could be saved! You could be saved! You could be saved!" He couldn't restrain his happiness; nor could he really find words to express it. Seeing him all excited, Xiao Longnu was infected with this joyous feeling. She sat up.

Yang Guo said, "Long'er, you listen to my words. Right now you are seriously injured so you can't use our sect's Jade Maiden skills. And this makes it difficult for you to recover from the injury. But if you can circulate your vital energy against the flow to heal yourself, the Chilled Jade Bed will precisely be a marvelous aid."

Xiao Longnu had yet to understand. She mumbled, "Vital energy against the flow... the Chilled Jade Bed..."

Happily, Yang Guo said, "Would you say this is fate? You've practiced the Jade Maiden skill, which was good enough. On

top of that we have the Chilled Jade Bed."

Xiao Longnu became confused so she said, "I still don't quite understand."

Yang Guo then explained, "The Jade Maiden skills follow the Yin energy but the reverse flow skills are pure Yang. When I talked about my adoptive father's reverse energy flow skills, I vaguely felt that your injured condition could be healed. Then I hit my head and, afterwards, recalled what Master Chongyang mentioned in his letter about the Chilled Jade. And it all became clear."

Xiao Longnu said, "So is that to say our Ancestor Grandma, who used the Chilled Jade Bed to treat her injury, could reverse the energy flow as well?"

Yang Guo said, "That's not likely. Our Ancestor Grandma would definitely not know this reverse energy flow technique. But I suspect that she was injured by the Yin's soft internal energy. Your injury, on the other hand, was caused by the opposite force of the hard Yang." Xiao Longnu smiled and nodded. Then with a joyful feeling, she put her mind at ease.

Yang Guo said, "We'd better not wait. Let us do it now." He then went into the firewood room and took out a bunch of firewood. He lit them up in the corner of the stone room. Then he taught Xiao Longnu the most basic elements of the reverse energy flow skills and helped her sit up on the Chilled Jade Bed. He sat by the fire. As he used his left hand to press against Xiao Longnu's right palm, he said, "I'll push this heat through each of your pressure points and you use your internal energy to circulate it against the normal flow. We'll do it one point at a time and when the heat comes back to the Chilled Jade Bed, your injured condition should improve a little bit." With a smile Xiao Longnu said, "Do I have to get down and spin myself just like you did?" Yang Guo said, "Nah, that's not necessary. Spinning is for shifting

pressure points. It's only good when fighting enemies. We are slowly healing your injury; sitting down here is just as good."

Xiao Longnu stretched her hand to hold his left palm and with a smile she said, "Come to think of it, that Guo Guniang wasn't too mean. She didn't cut off both of your arms." The two people had been through so many near death incidents that the matter of missing an arm became trivial. And Xiao Longnu was even joking about it. Yang Guo also laughed and retorted, "If both of my arms got cut off, I'd still have two feet. Only that using my soles to help you circulate the energy would be hilariously smelly and not quite elegant." Xiao Longnu scoffed and then silently recited the principle of reverse energy flow. After a while, she said, "I've got it!"

Yang Guo saw that the fire was burning too intense so he got up to slow it down. And just when they were about to begin circulating the energy, he suddenly called out, "Ai yo! I almost missed one important detail! Xiao Longnu said, "What is it?" Yang Guo pointed to Guo Xiang who was sleeping at the foot of the bed and said, "At a critical moment, if this little devil cries out, it will be quite a disaster!" Xiao Longnu then murmured, "Very dangerous!" When one was circulating and cultivating energy, the most evil taboo was a disturbed mind. Quite some time ago, Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo were practicing their Jade Maiden skills and were discovered by Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing. Xiao Longnu's anger caused her to spit up blood and she almost died. In addition to that, at that time her body was normally healthy. Today she was heavily injured, how would she be able to withstand any bit of distraction?

Yang Guo mixed half a bowl of the bee honey, picked up Guo Xiang, and fed her before moving her to a distant stone chamber. He shut two doors between them so even if she cried out, they wouldn't hear her. Then he came back to stay by the chilled jade bed and said, "To clear the thirty six major

pressure points your body, I think at best it will take ten days and at worst about half a month. Originally it should have taken many, many days because it's hard to avoid distraction. But our Gu Mu is completely isolated from the outside world, making it the best place on earth for recovery. Even the most remote wild mountain or valley won't be as good because there will always be the sound of birds or the smell of flowers to disturb one's mind."

Xiao Longnu smiled and said, "My injury was caused by the Quanzhen Taoists but it was their founding master who gave us the tomb chamber and the Chilled Jade Bed for me to rest and recover in. So their merits and crimes actually cancelled out each other."

Then Yang Guo said, "What about that Jinlun Fawang? We can't let him get away with it."

Xiao Longnu sighed and said, "So long as I can live, what else do you have to be unhappy about?"

Yang Guo held her hand and said, "You are right. This time after you've recovered, we'll never fight with people again. God is so kind to us. Hmmm..."

Xiao Longnu gently said, "We'll go south to become farmers and we'll raise a lot of chickens and ducks..." As she was saying that, she felt the heat energy passing into her body. With a trembling heart, she used the reverse energy flow technique that Yang Guo taught her to circulate that energy.

This healing method of using the reverse energy flow technique and the Chilled Jade Bed to complement each other was really strange but the result was also very effective. Years ago, Reverend Yi Deng had used the "Divine One Yang Finger" to cure Huang Rong's injury by circulating energy and clearing all her pressure points in pretty much the same way. The difference was that using the One Yang

Finger to cure an illness ravenously consumed a lot of Reverend Yi Deng's internal energy but hence lead to a quick recovery. Yang Guo's method would take many days to see results. And more than that, for a non-martial person who was heavily injured, a master of the One Yang Finger would use his profound internal energy to help the injured circulate the Yang energy and thus bring him back to health. In Xiao Longnu's case, she didn't have a very deep internal energy foundation but she and Yang Guo were from the same sect, yet could use different techniques. Not even Ouyang Feng coming back from the grave or Huang Yaoshi arriving could create a harmony between the helper and the helped like this. And nor would they be able to help Xiao Longnu to reverse her energy flow without innumerable difficulties.

Three times a day, Yang Guo would go out to feed Guo Xiang with honey and boiled pumpkin. Other than that he rarely left Xiao Longnu's side. To clear major pressure points, sometimes it would take four or five hours during which their hands could not be separated. At the time Guo Jing was injured, Huang Rong spent seven days and seven nights helping him cure the injuries. Compared to Guo Jing's sturdy body, Xiao Longnu's was far more delicate and so her injury was many times more serious.

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That day at the outskirts of the woods, Huang Rong used her "Orchid Brushing Accupoint" skills to defeat Li Mochou. Then she looked everywhere but still couldn't find her baby Guo Xiang. She was filled with anxiety and sorrow. As she came out of the forest, she shouted at Li Mochou, "What kind of tricks did you use? Where did you hide my baby?"

Surprised, Li Mochou said, "Isn't the little girl tucked behind the thorn fence?"

Huang Rong was so worried that she almost broke down in tears. She shook her head and replied, "She's disappeared."

Li Mochou had been fostering Guo Xiang for many days and was quite attached to her. Suddenly hearing that she was missing, her heart skipped a beat. She quickly said, "Must be either Yang Guo or Jinlun Fawang."

Huang Rong then asked, "How do you know?"

Then Li Mochou told her about her fight with Yang Guo and Fawang over the baby outside the walls of Xiangyang. As she talked about the dangers, Huang Rong couldn't keep her indifferent appearance. Seeing Li Mochou's worried expression, Huang Rong was then convinced that she didn't know where Guo Xiang was and so she stretched out her hand to unseal the "Jade Pearl" pressure point [Xuan Ji] on her chest. With Huang Rong's technique, Li Mochou could move round but she wouldn't be able to hurt anyone for a twelve-hour period.

With a forced smile, Li Mochou straightened up her body and brushed away the dirt. She said, "If it was Yang Guo who took her, she wouldn't be harmed. I'm only afraid that Fawang snatched her." Huang Rong asked again, "Why is that?" Li Mochou replied, "Yang Guo was extremely good with the little baby girl. He quickly protected her from harm. That was why I blindly thought she was his daughter." Having realized what she just said, she suddenly shut up for fear that Huang Rong would get angry again.

But really Huang Rong's mind was occupied by another matter. She was thinking about how Yang Guo and Li Mochou battled with Jinlun Fawang to protect Guo Xiang, while she herself and Guo Fu wrongly accused him of abominable crimes, and how Guo Fu had cut off his arm. Deep down in her heart was a grim regret. She blamed herself, "Alas, Guo'er has saved Jing Ge Ge [Brother Jing]. He's saved me.

He's saved Fu'er. And this time he's saved Xiang'er... First impressions always stuck in my heart. I thought about his terribly evil father and then concluded that the son had to be like the father. I've never trusted him... Occasionally I treated him nicely and then I'd suspect him of doing something again. Rong'er... Rong'er... You've prided yourself on being intelligent. You've spoken of confidentiality and righteousness. You are really nothing like Jing Ge Ge [Brother Jing]."

Seeing tears brimming in her eyes, Li Mochou thought she was worried about her daughter's safety. So she urged, "Guo Fu Ren [Madame Guo], your daughter is only a month old. She's gone through quite a catastrophe but not even a single hair on her head is damaged. She was born as pretty as a doll [jade snow]. Even a she-devil, who killed people without batting an eye like me, likes her very much. She must have been born with a lucky life... the life that will change misfortune into fortune. And for all that, you can be at peace. Let the two of us go look for her together."

Huang Rong wiped away the tears with her shirt sleeve and thought that what Li Mochou said was quite right. She also thought, "Honesty is the best way. Later on, I'll let people think badly of me but I won't think badly of people." Then she stretched out her hand to unseal Li Mochou's "Jade Pearl" point [Xuan Ji] again and said, "Li Dao Zhang [Sister Li] is willing to go find my daughter with me, I'm very grateful. But if you have an important matter to attend to, I can see you later."

Li Mochou said, "What important matter? The most important thing is to find this little baby. You wait a minute!" Having said that, she rushed to the big hole inside a big tree and untied a rope on a leopard's foot. Then she slapped its behind and said, "Off you go." That leopard let out a low roar and quickly disappeared into the long grass. Puzzled, Huang

Rong asked, "What did the leopard do?" With a laugh, Li Mochou said, "That was your daughter's 'wet-nurse'."

Huang Rong smiled faintly and the two people headed back into town. Then they saw Guo Fu standing at the road that led into town. She was waiting impatiently for her mother.

Seeing Huang Rong, Guo Fu jumped up with joy and called out, "Ma [Mother], little sister was..." She cut herself off in mid-sentence when she unexpectedly saw that standing behind her mother was Li Mochou and she couldn't help being frightened. She prepared herself to fight. In past times, she'd heard Wu Di Xiong [The Wu Brothers] say that Li Mochou killed their mother, so in her heart this was the most evil person on earth.

Huang Rong said, "Li Dao Zhang [Sister Li] is helping us search for your little sister. What did you say about your sister just now?"

Guo Fu replied, "Mei Mei [Sister] was kidnapped by Yang Guo. And he also snatched my little red horse. You look at this sword." Having said that, she raised a bent sword to show her mother and said, "He used his empty shirt sleeve to strike it. The sword hit the corner of a wall and it turned out like this."

Huang Rong and Li Mochou asked at the same time, "Using his shirt sleeve?"

Guo Fu replied, "Yes, it was really weird! Who would have thought he'd learned a devil Kung fu."

Huang Rong and Li Mochou looked at each other in amazement. The two of them naturally knew that a person with extremely profound internal energy could definitely turn silk into a stick, or use a soft material to strike a hard object. However, even if such a renowned and talented master could be found, he would still need thirty or forty years of practice

to reach that level. At a very young age, Yang Guo surprisingly had reached this high stage. And this was extremely rare. As Huang Rong heard that her daughter was taken by Yang Guo, she felt quite relieved. Li Mochou, on the other hand, thought to herself, "This boy's marvelous Kung Fu must be the result of learning from my master's Jade Heart Manual. Right now I have Guo Fu Ren [Madame Guo] with me. If I help her get her daughter back, she will help me snatch the manual. I'm the first disciple of the sect. Even though Shi Mei [Apprentice Sister] was Master's favorite, she'd already broken the sect's rule. How could I let the manual fall into a man's hand?" And with this thought, she felt herself quite righteous.

Huang Rong had tracked down Yang Guo's direction and said, "Fu'er, you don't have to go back to the Peach Blossom Island anymore. We'll go find Yang Da Ge [Big Brother Yang] together."

Guo Fu was very pleased, and said, "Okay, Okay!" But then when she thought that she would have to see Yang Guo, her face turned completely pale.

Huang Rong's face was grim and she said, "When you see him again; don't ask him if he's forgiven you. You have to sincerely take the blame and apologize."

In her heart, Guo Fu didn't want to submit so she said, "Why do I have to do it? Isn't he the one kidnapping Mei Mei [Sister]?"

Huang Rong simply rephrased Li Mochou's words and said, "If he really had an evil intention, do you think your sister would still live today? Also, if he didn't just hit your sword but rather aimed at your small head, don't you think right now this would be quite a pretty scene?"

Hearing her mother's words, Guo Fu still couldn't help but shiver inside. She secretly thought, "Is that to say he's really shown mercy?" But since she had been spoiled since she was little she still argued, "He's snatched my sister away; naturally he is on his way to the Passionless Valley!"

Huang Rong shook her head and said, "No, he would definitely go back to Mount Zhongnan."

Guo Fu pursed her lips and said, "Ma, you are actually helping him! If he really had a good intention, why wouldn't he bring Mei Mei back to us in Xiangyang? For what reason would he have to take her to Mount Zhongnan?"

Huang Rong sighed and said, "You and Yang Da Ge [Big Brother Yang] grew up together. For all that you still don't understand his character! He's always been arrogant and he's never taken kindly to insults. You cut off his arm. He could have taken your life but he didn't have the heart to. But for this matter, he also wouldn't back down. He took your sister away to make us worry. When time passes and his anger disappears, he'll just bring your sister back to us. Have you understood? You accused him of stealing your little sister so he simply did it to show you that he could!"

Huang Rong returned to the small restaurant that they just visited. She borrowed stationary and penned a short letter. Then she gave the store partner two silver coins for him to deliver the letter to Guo Jing in Xiangyang.

That man said, "Guo Da Xia [Hero Guo] protects our borders and keeps our mind at ease. He really is our people's Buddha. If we little people can help in anyway, we'll not hesitate." He was not willing to take the money. He picked up the letter and happily left. Guo Fu saw that many people revered her father like this; she was very pleased in her heart.

The three people bought mules and set out toward Mount Zhongnan. Guo Fu didn't like Li Mochou and they rarely talked on the way. When she bumped into Li Mochou by chance and couldn't avoid talking, her expression would turn cold. They started traveling in the morning and stopped at night to rest. The journey was smooth. But this afternoon, while the three of them rode in a line, they saw someone speeding her horse towards them.

End of Chapter 28.

Chapter 29 - Ultimate Disasters

Translated by Beedreamer



In the smoke Guo Fu was disoriented and about to faint. She was so frightened that she couldn't even cry out. Suddenly she heard someone's shouting from the east side, only to see a whirlwind that wrapped around a gray shadow coming towards her. Wherever the spinning wind passed through, the fire would split open into two sections. The shadow was of course Yang Guo.

Guo Fu called out, "It's my little red horse. It's my..." As she was saying that, the red horse rushed in front of them. Guo Fu leapt forward. The red horse recognized its master and didn't need for her to pull the reins. It fought to stop, raised its head, and neighed.

Guo Fu saw that mounting on the horse was a young girl dressed in black. When they met before, Guo Fu was fighting side by side with her against Li Mochou. This girl was indeed Wanyan Ping. Her hair was disheveled. Her face was greenish pale. And she looked extremely distressed. Seeing that, Guo Fu asked, "Wanyan Zi Zi [Elder Sister Wanyan], what's happened to you?"

Wanyan Ping pointed her finger to the path she just came from and said, "Quick... Quick..." Suddenly her body toppled, falling down from the horse.

Guo Fu cried out in alarm and reached out to support her. She turned to her mother and said, "Ma, this is elder sister Wanyan." While saying that, she gave Li Mochou a stare.

Huang Rong mused, "She raced the precious horse [Han Xie Yu] like this. Nobody in the world could catch up with her so of course she was not in danger. But when she pointed her finger to the North, she had a distressed look. She must be worried about other people. We must rush out to help them." So she told her daughter to help Wanyan Ping sit up on the

horse and also said, "This horse's feet are too swift. You can't rush ahead of me no matter what!" Guo Fu asked, "Why not?" Huang Rong quipped, "There's a great danger lying ahead. How have you not figured it out?" After saying that she gave Li Mochou a hand signal and the two galloped north.

After rushing for ten li, as expected they heard the faint sounds of weapons clashing from the other side of the mountain. Huang Rong and Li Mochou urged the mules to go around the mountain and then in the field before them they saw five people engaging in a wicked fight. Two of them were the Wu brothers. There were also a young man and a young woman Huang Rong did not recognize. The four of them were fighting against a middle-aged man and even though it was four against one, they were defending more than attacking. The Wu brothers were both wounded and the young man was fiercely brandishing his long sword against that middle-aged man's better moves. Lying down on the ground nearby was another person, Wu Santong, who was incessantly yelling and shouting.

Huang Rong saw that man's left hand holding a large flashing gold knife and his right hand wielding a thin, long, black sword. His sword moves were strangely fantastic and not something she'd seen before. If she herself didn't jump in, the Wu brothers would definitely be in imminent danger. So she said to Li Mochou, "Those two young men are my disciples."

Li Mochou let out a laugh and said, "Their mother was killed by me. How can it be that you don't know?" Li Mochou saw that the middle-aged man's martial skills were strangely high. She'd never heard that there was such a person in Jianghu and she was secretly quite astonished. Finally, she faintly smiled and said, "Let's fight!" Li Mochou pulled out her fly whisk while Huang Rong also held firm the bamboo stick in her hand. Then together the two of them approached

that man from left and right. Li Mochou's brush attacked his black sword while Huang Rong's bamboo cane tangled his gold knife.

This middle-aged man was of course the master of the Passionless Valley sect Gongsun Zhi. As he suddenly saw two middle-aged beautiful females coming to attack in pair, his heart shook. But then he heard Li Mochou shout, "One!" and her whisk flashed out. "Two!" she called out again. At first she and Huang Rong were secretly comparing their strength to see who would first beat this person but as she continuously counted to "ten", Gongsun Zhi was still attacking and defending. Then, with three stances, the young man's sword was thrust to the back of Gongsun Zhi. These sword stances were packed with fierce strength. Gongsun Zhi knew he'd eventually lose if he continued to fight so he didn't try to block them but instead jumped forward over ten feet. He looked at Huang Rong and Li Mochou and secretly thought, "Where did these two ferocious women come from? But oh, how beautiful they are!" Having thought that, he clashed his knife and sword, making a weng-weng sound, and then leapt up again.

Huang Rong and Li Mochou didn't dare to underestimate the enemy so they tightened up their guards. Gongsun Zhi turned his body around in midair and when he dropped to the ground, he got up again and rushed up the mountain. With a smile, Huang Rong and Li Mochou looked at each other and both thought, "This person had powerful martial skills and was also cunning. If fighting by myself, I'm afraid that I wouldn't be his match."

The Wu brothers pressed their wounds with their hands and moved forward to kowtow to their Shi Mu [Martial Mother]. Then they both stood up and angrily stared at Li Mochou. Huang Rong said, "You won't settle the old debt today. Your father's injury would be in the way, wouldn't it? Who are

these two people? Ai yo, wretched! Li Zi Zi [Elder Sister Li] come with me quickly!" She didn't even waste time getting on the mule but flew her body toward the road and rushed out. Li Mochou didn't get her meaning but still followed her. Then she asked, "What's the matter?" Huang Rong answered, "Fu'er, Fu'er will run right into this person!"

The two used their internal energy to pursue him but Gongsun Zhi was really fast. Only with a somewhat small delay, he'd already left them far behind.

Guo Fu was supporting Wanyan Ping with both hands. Both of them rode the red horse and slowly emerged from behind the mountain. Huang Rong saw them from a distance so she used her internal energy to call out, "Fu'er, be careful!" Her sound hadn't even faded when Gongsun Zhi quickly approached them and jumped up onto the horse's back. He stretched out his hand to hold Guo Fu still while pulling the reins to turn the horse's head around. Seeing that, Huang Rong puckered her lips to whistle and then rushed forward.

Gongsun Zhi was startled and thought, "How come today all my affairs went wrong like this? Can't I even befriend a domesticated animal?" Then he exerted his strength to rein in the horse. This force was not weak and so the red horse let out a long neigh and reared up. Thinking to flee southward, Gongsun Zhi forced the horse to turn around but instead it flitted about and kicked up its legs. And then it unexpectedly moved backwards step-by-step. Delighted, Huang Rong sped up. Gongsun Zhi saw that the red horse was incredibly stubborn and that Huang Rong and Li Mochou were closing in, he sheathed the weapons. Holding Guo Fu with his right hand and Wanyan Ping with his left, they got off the horse. Now Huang Rong and Li Mochou, with their lightness kung fu, were approaching fast and were only a short distance away.

Gongsun Zhi turned around and said with a smile, "If I squeeze my arms, will these two beautiful and delicate girls still live?"

Huang Rong asked, "Who are you, sir? You and I have never met. Why would you capture my daughter?"

With a smile Gongsun Zhi said, "This is your daughter? Are you really Wanyan Fu Ren [Madame Wanyan]?"

Huang Rong pointed at Guo Fu and said, "That one is my daughter!"

Gongsun Zhi looked at Guo Fu and turned to gaze at Huang Rong. With a grin he said, "Tsk...tsk...tsk, very beautiful. Mother and daughter are both beautiful, very beautiful!"

Although Huang Rong was furious, her daughter was in his hands. She had to be careful not to fight the enemy and harm her daughter in the process. Therefore she had used a delay tactic and reasoned with him. But suddenly she heard the two 'Sou...Sou' whishing sounds from behind. Two long arrows flew past her own left cheek and straight towards Gongsun Zhi. The arrows were fiercely fast and they made extremely loud sounds while cutting through the air. Upon hearing the sounds of the arrows, she was so happy she almost cried out, thinking it was surely her husband arriving. The martial masters in the central plains of China rarely learned arrow techniques. And even though Mongolian warriors' bow techniques were refined, without solid internal energy it was difficult to send an arrow very far. These two arrows were making such loud and solid sounds. Except for Guo Jing, she'd never seen any other person who could do it. But this arrow skill was actually still far from Guo Jing's level. By the time the arrows were halfway, Huang Rong realized that the shooter was not her husband.

Seeing the arrows zooming in, Gongsun Zhi opened his mouth and bit the tip of the first arrow and at the same time stepped aside, using the arrow shaft in his mouth to brush away the second one.

Huang Rong thought, "If it were Jing Ge Ge [Brother Jing] who shot those arrows, I bet using your mouth to catch an arrow like that would give you a hole in your throat." As she was about to move forward, she heard a series of 'Sou...Sou' whishing sounds again. Nine arrows flew in one by one, aiming at the area between Gongsun Zhi's eyebrows. And this time, in a tight situation, Gongsun Zhi had to put down the two girls and pull out his sword to block the arrows.

As Huang Rong and Li Mochou quickly rushed forward to rescue the two girls, they saw a flashing gray shadow rolling Guo Fu to the roadside. When that body turned over to get up, Gongsun Zhi, ignoring his gold knife, shot out his bare palm to strike the top of that person's head.

Lying on the ground, that person turned over his palm to block the attack. There came a clashing sound. Dust flew up all over the place. Gongsun Zhi then called out, "Good!" and sent out his second strike, with more strength this time. Seeing that it would be difficult for that person to block the attack, Huang Rong lashed out her "Dog Beating Stick", using the "seal" stance to intercept that palm strike. Gongsun Zhi saw himself surrounded by the enemies. He knew that he couldn't win today. So with a 'Ha-Ha' laugh, he backed up three steps and turned his body to walk away. He appeared to carry himself naturally, with martial grace. Huang Rong and the others didn't dare to pursue.

While still holding Guo Fu, the person stood up. Then he dropped his arms. Huang Rong saw that he had a tall body with broad biceps, with a long bow hanging from his waist. This was precisely that youth who fought with a sword earlier.

Also, naturally he was the one who shot out those eleven arrows. Even though Guo Fu fell into Gongsun Zhi's clutches just now, she wasn't injured at all and so she said, "Yelu Da Ge [Big Brother Yelu], many thanks for saving me." While saying that, she blushed prettily.

By this time Wu Xiuwen and a young girl caught up with them, leaving Wu Dunru to take care of his father. Normally, Wu Xiuwen should be the one introducing everybody but he was filled with rage and was viciously eyeing Li Mochou. He forgot everybody else at present. Huang Rong called him twice but he didn't even hear it. Li Mochou actually moved far away from them with her hands behind her back, watching the scenery. She of course didn't pay attention to these people.

Guo Fu pointed at the young man who had just rescued her and said to her mother, "Ma, this person is Yelu Qi, Yelu Da Ge [Big Brother Yelu]." Then she pointed at the tall young girl and said, "And this is Yelu Yan, Yelu Zi Zi [Elder Sister Yelu]." Huang Rong then praised them, "You two have quite wonderful kung fu!" The Yelu siblings together replied, "Guo Fu Ren [Madame Guo] praises us!" and moved forward to pay respect.

Huang Rong then asked, "It looks like you two use the Quanzhen sect's kung fu. May I ask which of the Quanzhen Seven Masters your master is?" She saw Yelu Qi's martial skills and, except for Yang Guo, couldn't think of any other fourth generation disciple of the Quanzhen sect. Yelu Yan said, "My brother taught me my martial skills." Huang Rong nodded and turned to look at Yelu Qi. Yelu Qi felt quite awkward and said, "Elder asked me a question, I really should give you a truthful answer. Only my master has forbidden me, the young generation, to mention his old name. Guo Fu Ren [Madame Guo], please forgive me."

Huang Rong was startled and thought, "Would the Quanzhen Seven Masters come up with this strange rule? This young man's martial skills were quite excellent, why couldn't he say his master's name?" Having thought this out, she suddenly burst out into a laugh and bent over with hands on her belly. This matter was really extremely funny. Puzzled, Guo Fu asked, "Ma, what's so funny?" She heard her mother seriously asked Yelu Qi which sect he belonged to. And suddenly she breaks out laughing like this. She was afraid that Yelu Qi would be upset so, embarrassed, she asked again, "Ma, Yelu Da Ge [Brother Yelu] can't say it. That's okay. What's so funny?" Still laughing, Huang Rong didn't answer. Yelu Qi had a smiling expression on his face and said, "Seems like Guo Fu Ren [Madame Guo] guessed correctly." Guo Fu was at a loss. She turned her head to look at Yelu Yan and saw that she was also in the dark, not understanding what the two were laughing about.

Right now Wu Xiuwen was kneeling down to bandage Wanyan Ping's injury. Just now, while she was held hostage by Gongsun Zhi, she twisted her left ankle while escaping. Huang Rong asked, "Xiu'er how's your father's wound?" Wu Xiuwen replied, "Father was cut by that old Gongsun's sword. His left leg was injured but luckily the sword didn't damage his bone." Huang Rong nodded and walked over to lightly stroke the precious horse's mane. She gently said, "Horse, oh horse, our Guo family won't be able to repay you for your deep loyalty." Then she saw that Wu Xiuwen, with his rather strange expression, didn't speak to Guo Fu at all but took extremely good care of Wanyan Ping. But she didn't know whether he did this to show Guo Fu he was over her or he really was fond of this girl. She decided not to pursue the matter and said, "Let us go get your father."

Wu Santong was sitting on the ground. When he saw Huang Rong approaching, he called out, "Guo Fu Ren [Madame Guo]!" and got up. He had a leg wound so his body was

swaying. Wu Dunru and Yelu Yan reached out to hold him at the same time. As their hands bumped, they looked at each other with a smile.

Huang Rong secretly laughed in her heart, "How nice, another couple! Just a few days ago, the brothers were willing to kill each other for Fu'er, not thinking about their blood ties. Now that the boys have met pretty girls, they've instantly turned around and forgotten all about their original feelings." Suddenly she thought about Guo Jing and her heart couldn't help but swell with pride. Jing Ge Ge [Brother Jing] always stayed true to her and never changed, be it in good or bad fortune. How would these youths be able to compare to him? Then she thought about Yang Guo. She felt that his relationship with Xiao Longnu was unseemly. But she also knew that he was smart about relationships and stayed faithful to his love both in life and in death. That was actually something to be revered and respected.

The Wu brothers and Guo Fu grew up together on Peach Blossom Island. Firstly, on the island there was no other girl of their age. Second, time made the hearts grow fonder. If the two brothers didn't fall in love with Guo Fu, that wouldn't make sense at all. Later on, they suddenly found out that Guo Fu didn't return their feelings; they were brokenhearted and said that they would live a life without joy forever. They had no way of knowing that a short while later they would meet Yelu Yan and Wanyan Ping who they really should sympathize with. This time when the Wu brothers ran into Guo Fu, they secretly compared their sweethearts to her. The brothers felt that their loved ones were not only not inferior to Guo Fu but also even better. One thought, "Yelu Guniang [Miss Yelu] is open and kind. How could she be like you who are scheming and narrow-minded?" The other thought, "Wanyan Guniang is clearly sympathetic. She is also gentle and polite. How could she be like you who everyday makes people miserable?" The brothers had earlier vowed not to see

Guo Fu again but had now ran into her by accident and couldn't quite escape. They both thought, "Today I didn't intend to go looking for you so this can't be regarded as breaking a vow."

In Guo Fu's mind, she only thought about how she had been captured by Gongsun Zhi just now and how Yelu Qi had saved her. She stole a look at him several times and saw that he was tall and handsome. She couldn't help secretly thinking, "I met him for the first time last year and later forgot all about him. At that time I didn't know that his martial skills would be like this. Mother and he were laughing together. What were they laughing about?"

Huang Rong examined the sword wound on Wu Santong's leg. Fortunately, it wouldn't be a great obstacle. Then everybody shared their stories.

On the day that Wu Santong, Zhu Ziliu and the Martial Uncle Indian monk left for the Passionless Valley to seek the antidote for Yang Guo, just outside of Xiangyang, Wu Santong ran into his two sons. Startled and afraid that they would fight again, he quickly told Zhu Ziliu to accompany Martial Uncle on ahead. Then he rushed out to stop the Wu brothers and asked questions. As it turned out, the Wu brothers both followed their vow spoken to Yang Guo about not seeing Guo Fu again so they didn't want to stay in Xiangyang any longer. Wu Santong was reassured so he praised them, "Good boys, you've got guts!" He also said, "Yang Xiong Di [Brother Yang] risked his own life to save us. Now he is in trouble, how can we not try to help him? The three of us, father and sons, should go to the Passionless Valley together."

The Passionless Valley was like a paradise outside this world. Although Yang Guo had told them about its approximate location, it was actually not easy to find the entrance. The

three people went around in circle and took many paths but still they couldn't find the Valley entrance. The Indian monk and Zhu Ziliu had already fallen into the enemy's trap and been captured by the fishnets of Qiu Qianchi's disciples. Wu Santong and his sons tried many times to help them without success and almost fell into the gorge. With no choice but to retreat, they thought that they would go back to Xiangyang to find help. Unfortunately, they ran into Gongsun Zhi who said the three of them were trespassing and then attacked them. Wu Santong was not his match and was cut on the leg. Gongsun Zhi didn't really want the three people's lives and so he just forced them to leave quickly and told them never to come back.

By this time, the Yelu siblings and Wanyan Ping happened to ride into view. The three people and the Wu brothers used to fight together so they got off their horses and started talking about the old times. Gongsun Zhi was looking at them coldly from the side. He failed to marry Xiao Longnu and got kicked out of the sect by his wife so he was actually bored to death. Seeing that Wanyan Ping was young and beautiful, he couldn't curb his evil desires and suddenly snatched her away with him. This time, the Yelu siblings and the Wu brothers all immediately jumped in to fight. If Wu Santong hadn't been injured, it would be six people joining forces and they would have had a chance against Gongsun Zhi. However, his leg was wounded so Yelu Qi was the only strong fighter among them but they couldn't fend off Gongsun Zhi. It just so happened that the precious horse [Han Xie Yu] was running back by himself from Mount Zhongnan and heading towards Xiangyang. Wu Xiuwen grabbed him and let Wanyan Ping ride away; hoping that Gongsun Zhi would lose interest after the swan was gone. They didn't expect that Huang Rong and Li Mochou would rush into the scene like this.

Huang Rong listened to the stories and talked briefly about how Yang Guo got his arm chopped off and how he snatched

her young daughter. Wu Santong was greatly alarmed and quickly explained the root cause. He said, "Yang Xiong Di [Brother Yang] is brave and warm-hearted. Everything happened because, without thinking about himself, he saved these two animals of mine and didn't let them destroy themselves. Who would have thought that it would lead to these matters?" He thought about how Yang Guo got his arm chopped off, all because of his two sons. And the more he thought about it, the angrier he became. He suddenly pointed at the two sons and scolded them.

On the side, the Wu brothers, the Yelu siblings, and Wanyan Ping were all talking enthusiastically. A little while later, Guo Fu came in to join the discussion. The six people were of the same age and just went through a fierce battle together so with gusto they talked about how fierce and evil Gongsun Zhi was and how he finally fled into the wild. Suddenly they heard Wu Santong bellowed out a shout of outrage, "Wu Dunru, Wu Xiuwen, you two little animals, Yang Guo Xiong Di [Brother Yang Guo] was so good and kind to you but you caused him to lose his arm. You stop and think, how would our family Wu ever face him?" Both his face and ears turned red and the more he scolded, the fiercer he became. If not for his injured leg, he would have thrown himself out to strike them. The two brothers were baffled, not knowing how their father got so mad. Each of them stealthily looked at Yelu Yan and Wanyan Ping. They felt that in front of beautiful ladies, having their father calling them 'animal this' and 'animal that' was a great loss of face. But if they were still fighting over Guo Fu like before, that would be distressing too. The two brothers looked at each other at their wits' end, not knowing what to do.

Huang Rong saw the situation to be quite awkward so she intercepted, "Wu Xiong Di [Brother Wu], don't be so upset. Yang Guo's losing an arm was all little sister's fault for not teaching my child better and letting her get away with being

spoiled. At that time, father Guo was also so mad that he wanted to chop off her arm." Wu Santong then gave out a loud shout, "That's right. Good! Her arm should be chopped off!" Guo Fu's eyes turned white with fear. She thought, "Did you just say 'her arm should be chopped off'?" If her mother weren't there, Guo Fu would have said something in protest.

Huang Rong said, "Wu Xiong [Brother Wu], we've talked clearly enough about how your children wronged Yang Guo. Right now we have two important matters ahead. First, we must find Yang Guo to discover his condition." Wu Santong agreed, "Very good...Very good." Huang Rong then continued, "The second important thing is that we have to go to the Passionless Valley to rescue Martial Uncle and Zhu Da Ge [Brother Zhu] and at the same time get the antidote for Yang Guo. But do you know anything about Zhu Da Ge's condition or whether or not his life is in danger?"

Wu Santong said, "My Martial Uncle and apprentice brother were trapped by the fish nets and imprisoned in a stone chamber (kiln). It seemed like that old woman still hasn't thought to harm them." Huang Rong nodded and said, "Hmm, in that case we go to find Yang Guo first and go with him to the Passionless Valley to save those people. And once the antidote is obtained, he can take it immediately to avoid any more delays, and hence more dangers." Wu Santong said, "That's right. But do we know where Yang Guo is right now?" Huang Rong pointed at the precious horse [Han Xie Yu] and said, "This horse was just borrowed by Yang Guo. If we follow the road that this horse came from, we can find out where he is." Wu Santong was delighted and said, "Today, if not for the wisdom of Guo Fu Ren [Madame Guo], the old Wu here would have flown into a fit of rage and made matters worse." This time Guo Fu couldn't bear to be quiet so she chimed in, "Isn't that right?"

Huang Rong smiled faintly. She didn't say a word about seeking her younger daughter but all about getting Wu Santong to follow her. She mused, "If the Wu father and sons come with me, the other three young people will definitely tag along. Then there will be more people to help us. Isn't that wonderful?" She then turned to Yelu Qi and said, "If Yelu Xiao Ge [Little Brother Yelu] doesn't have any pressing matters to attend to, how about you come along with us just for fun?" Yelu Qi had not yet answered, but Yelu Yan clapped her hands, crying out, "Okay... Okay! Ge Ge [Brother], let's go with them!" Yelu Qi couldn't bear Guo Fu's gaze. Seeing that the glint in her eyes conveyed an encouraging message, he bowed and said, "If Elder Wu and Guo Fu Ren [Madame Guo] wouldn't mind, Junior could only benefit from your guidance. This is precisely my greatest wish." With a pleased expression on her face, Wanyan Ping also slowly nodded.

Huang Rong then said, "Look, we are a group of many people, we must have someone to give orders. Wu Xiong [Brother Wu], from now on everybody will listen to your commands and nobody can disobey." Wu Santong waved his hands and said, "We have in you a wonderful strategist who can match Zhuge, who would dare to give orders? Naturally, it has to be you in charge." With a smile Huang Rong said, "Really?" Wu Santong replied, "How can that be wrong?" Huang Rong laughed and said, "Giving orders to the juniors is quite easy. I'm only afraid that your old self wouldn't listen to me." Then in a loud voice Wu Santong said, "Nonsense. I won't do such a thing. If you tell me to jump in water and walk on fire, I won't say no in any circumstances." Huang Rong said, "In front of these many juniors, how could you say things you don't mean?" Wu Santong blushed and responded, "Even if there were no one else here, how could I fail to keep my word?"

Huang Rong said, "All right! This time we will go find Yang Guo, get the antidote, and rescue your Martial Uncle and

brother. We must work together. For any previous gratitude or grudges, we'll put them aside for the time being. Wu Xiong [Brother Wu], you, the Wu father and sons, cannot settle your debt with Li Mochou at this time. After we've accomplished our important mission, it will not be too late for shedding blood!" Wu Santong was startled. He hadn't thought that Huang Rong's spoken words would unexpectedly be meant for this matter as well. He and Li Mochou had wife-killing hatred to settle, how could he actually bear the rage in his heart? So he hesitated and didn't respond. With a gentle voice Huang Rong said, "Wu Xiong [Brother Wu], your leg has been injured. For a gentleman, revenge in ten years is still not too late. It won't hurt to wait a little while longer will it?" Wu Santong then replied, "Good, whatever you say, I'll do it."

Huang Rong raised her voice to call Li Mochou, "Li Zi Zi [Elder Sister Li], let's go!" They let the precious horse [Han Xie Yu] lead the way and the people followed. The red horse originally wanted to return to Xiangyang but had instead run into its master. Huang Rong was now walking in front of him and heading towards Mount Zhongnan.

Wu Santong and Wanyan Ping were injured so they couldn't just speed away. They all traveled a hundred li for each day and then stopped to rest. Li Mochou stayed clear of other people at night and hurried along with them at a distance during the day.

Traveling by day and resting by night, the six young men and women were having a good time chatting and laughing. And the further they went, the friendlier they became. When the Wu brothers originally were bickering over Guo Fu, their brotherhood ties were greatly strained. Now that each had his own love, the two brothers were on the best of terms. Wu Santong looked at them and his heart was greatly consoled. But also every time, he also thought, "That day, even if the two brothers weren't poisoned by Li Mochou, they could have

destroyed each other. I'd have been left with only one... I couldn't even call him a son. And today the two animals are surprisingly having a good time while Brother Yang has lost an arm. Alas, what can I really say? Only cutting off an arm from each of these two little animals and putting them on Brother Yang's body would make sense." As for the fact that Yang Guo would end up with three arms in that scenario, he hadn't actually thought about it.

And then one day they reached Mount Zhongnan. Huang Rong and Wu Santong led the group up to the Chongyang Palace to greet the Quanzhen five masters. Li Mochou stood at a distance and said, "I'll wait here then." Huang Rong knew Li Mochou and the Quanzhen sect had a grudge so she didn't press the matter and went up the path towards the Chongyang Palace.

Liu Chuxuan, Qiu Chuji and others were informed about their arrival so they quickly came out of the palace to welcome them. They entered the palace hall together and sat down at a provided place. As they were exchanging their greetings, they suddenly heard someone shouting loudly. Huang Rong was very delighted and called out, "Old Urchin, won't you come out and see who is here?"

Recently, Zhou Botong had been obsessively studying ways to command the Jade Bees. He was by nature intelligent and tenacious. But to everybody's surprise, he was happy with small successes and only wanted to play and have good times. Suddenly, he heard someone shouting. That was Huang Rong's voice. He was thrilled and so he said, "Aha... that is my brother's crafty and eccentric wife!" Then he made loud noises and rushed out from behind the hall.

Yelu Qi went forward and kowtowed. He said, "Shi Fu [Master], I pay you respect. May happiness be with you, Great Elder, forever." With a laugh Zhou Botong said,

"Enough, just get up! May happiness be with you little baby forever too!"

Hearing that, the people all found it strange. Nobody would have expected Yelu Qi to be Zhou Botong's disciple. This Old Urchin was madly crazy but his chosen disciple was a skilled gentleman. Together, they were nothing alike. Qiu Chuji and others saw that their Shi Shu [Martial Uncle] had accepted a disciple; they were all very happy and then busily congratulated him. And this time, Guo Fu understood what her mother and Yelu Qi were laughing about the other day. It was because her mother had guessed correctly that Zhou Botong was Yelu Qi's teacher.

Yelu Qi had met Zhou Botong twelve years ago. At that time he was still quite young so he and Zhou Botong played together quite nicely. Zhou Botong then accepted him as a disciple. Although Zhou Botong didn't teach him a lot of kung fu, Yelu Qi was talented and determined. He practiced his martial skills diligently and surprisingly became an outstanding character of the young generation. Sadly for him, Zhou Botong saw him growing up well-behaved and nothing like a small mischievous child. His heart was filled with regrets and therefore didn't allow Yelu Qi to call himself the Old Urchin's direct disciple. But by this point, Zhou Botong couldn't get rid of him either.

Amid all the excitement came sudden sounds of battle cries from below the mountain. The sect disciples reported that the enemy was gathering for an attack. The other day the Quanzhen sect refused to bow down to the Mongolian Prince's imperial decree and also killed many of them. Qiu Chuji and others knew that this matter couldn't easily be resolved and that the Mongolian army would sooner or later come back up the mountain. They also realized that the Quanzhen sect would not be able to fend off the Mongolian army so they had already arranged a plan to abandon the

palace and retreat to the West. By this time the Zhang Jiao [sect chief] position had already been assigned to a third generation disciple, Li Zhichang, but, facing this important matter, it was still left to the Quanzhen Five Masters to make decisions. Qiu Chuji turned to Huang Rong and said, "Guo Fu Ren [Madame Guo], the Mongolian army has attacked! This is such an inopportune time. Please don't think badly of our hospitality."

Then everybody heard the deadly sounds of drum rolls and battle cries from below the mountain. Just now Huang Rong had come up the mountain from the southern side while the Mongolian army took the northern route. They had arrived roughly about the same time.

Zhou Botong said, "Are the enemies coming? How really wonderful! Come, we'll go make mincemeat out of them." Then he stretched out his hand to grab Yelu Qi's wrist and said, "You show the kung fu Shi Fu [Master] taught you to these several old sect brothers. I say you are not worse than the Quanzhen Seven Masters. Add you to them and we'll make the Quanzhen Eight Masters." In general, when small children had a beloved toy, they would want to show it off to people. If people liked it, then they'd become very happy. At first Zhou Botong had forbidden Yelu Qi to tell people who his master was because Yelu Qi lacked naughtiness and didn't in the least bit resemble the famous Old Urchin's skilled disciple. But today the master and the disciple met again and were delighted to see each other. Zhou Botong totally forgot the rule he himself set up before.

Qiu Chuji said, "Shi Shu [Martial Uncle], our sect has existed for many decades. It is the lifetime blood and sweat of my late master and can't be ruined in just one moment. Today the best plan is for everybody in our sect to retreat." Not waiting for Zhou Botong to voice his opinion, he gave orders, "Everybody carry all the things and go down the mountain

according to our planned course." The many disciples replied in one voice, carried the packages that had been prepared earlier, and rushed down the east and west sides of the mountain in rows. A few days earlier, the Quanzhen Five Masters and Li Zhichang had properly divided people, detailing who would dash to the front and who would guard the back, where they would meet, and how to communicate. Also, they'd many times rehearsed the plan and so there was no chaos at the last moment.

Huang Rong said, "Qiu Dao Zhang [Taoist Elder Qiu], in a situation like this a small mistake could lead to a disaster. Your honored sect has arranged everything in order, indicating a great ability. When you stage a comeback, your sect will be even more prosperous. This time we are here to look for Yang Guo so we will take our leave right now." Qiu Chuji said with surprise in his voice; "Yang Guo? Do you know if he's still here on the mountain?" With a faint smile Huang Rong replied, "We've got someone who knows his whereabouts."

Having said this, she heard the loud battle cries again from below the mountain. Huang Rong thought, "The Quanzhen sect has earlier made an arrangement. They can withdraw themselves. I came up the mountain to look for Yang Guo and get my daughter. Let's not get into the battle and delay our important matter." Immediately she bid farewell to Qiu Chuji and others, called out to those who came up the mountain with her, and rushed out to the back of the Chongyang Palace. Then she said to Li Mochou, "Li Zi Zi [Sister Li], please tell us how to get into the tomb."

Li Mochou asked, "How do you know he's inside Gu Mu? Huang Rong chuckled and said, "Even if Yang Guo isn't inside Gu Mu, the Jade Heart Manual definitely is." Li Mochou shivered and secretly thought, "This Guo Fu Ren [Madame Guo] is indeed deadly. How did she know about my concern?"

Li Mochou followed this group of people from Xiangyang to Zhongnan. Except for Huang Rong, nobody paid attention to her. Along the way, there was nothing interesting and, needless to say, the Wu father and sons were secretly waiting to set a deathtrap for her. In her mind, Huang Rong thought, "Even if she likes Xiang'er very much, she won't be willing to put herself in a great danger. There surely must be an important scheme." Having mulled over this, she remembered that Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu had used the "Jade Maiden Swordplay" to defeat Jinlun Fawang. Li Mochou obviously didn't know these skills of the sect, otherwise she'd have used it. How wouldn't she be interested? She was actually going to get the Jade Heart Manual but was afraid that the seven people would get inside Gu Mu before her and take it. Huang Rong put two and two together and guessed correctly what Li Mochou was thinking.

Li Mochou thought that since Huang Rong already knew her intention, she could just make it bluntly clear. She said, "I'll help you get back your daughter and you must help me get my sect's martial manual back. You are the Chief of the Beggar Clan and also a world-renowned heroine; you cannot say things you don't mean."

Huang Rong then said, "Yang Guo is the son of my husband Guo's deceased friend. He and I have some small misunderstandings, which will easily disappear when we see each other. If my daughter is really with him, he'll return her to me himself and there's no need to talk about baby snatching." Li Mochou retorted, "If that's the case, we'll go our own separate ways and say goodbye here." After saying that, she turned to walk away.

Huang Rong gave Wu Santong a meaningful glance. Wu Santong unsheathed his long sword and shouted, "Li Mochou, do you still think you can leave Mount Zhongnan alive today?"

Li Mochou thought that she herself was not even Huang Rong's match. Now adding the Wu father and sons, the Yelu siblings, and others, how would she be able to break her way out? Originally she had a clever plan but she ran into Huang Rong and surprisingly found her hands and feet tied, not being able to use all her sly tricks. So indifferently she said to Huang Rong, "Guo Fu Ren [Madame Guo] can cleverly change. Since Yang Guo is on the mountain, why are you still worried about not finding him? Why do you need me to lead the way?"

Huang Rong knew that Li Mochou had to be forced so she said, "Little sister actually doesn't have the ability to find the entrance to Gu Mu. However, even if Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu have secluded themselves inside the tomb, eventually they must come out to buy rice and cut firewood. If seven of us scatter around and wait patiently, surely we'll run into them some day." The meaning of this was that - if you were not willing to guide us, we'd immediately kill you. Finding Yang Guo a few days later was not that important.

Li Mochou thought about it. The opponents were really strong and secure. Right here on the flat land, she was overwhelmed by numbers. However, if she led these many people to the underground tomb, where she was familiar with the terrain, she could find a way to secretly kill them off one by one. So she said, "Today you won by numbers, I have nothing to say. Anyhow, I also want to find Yang Guo. Come with me!" She pushed aside prickly shrubs and walked inside the tree thickets.

Huang Rong and others followed her close behind, fearing that she would suddenly run away. She saw Li Mochou making her way through clusters of rocks. Many parts were obviously not passable, with zigzagging paths that led to a dead end. This terrain was all natural, with no human interference. So even though Huang Rong knew the "Five

Phrase 'Marvelous Gate' art, she couldn't use its logic to figure out the way. She thought, "There is a saying 'Wonderful workmanship exceeds nature.' In fact, how could human beings ever surpass the work of nature?"

They walked for a while and then arrived at the bank of a small creek. At this time they could still hear the sounds of the Mongolian battle cries but as they were deep in the woods, the shouting sounded as if it was coming from very far away.

For several years, Li Mochou had planned to steal the Jade Heart Manual. Last time, she left the tomb from the bottom of the creek; she nearly died because she didn't know how to swim very well. Later she practiced her water skills in a river to prepare for this. She stood by the creek and said, "The main entrance to Gu Mu has been shut. To open it, you must use years and years of work. We can dive into this creek to get to the back entrance. How many people will come with me?"

Guo Fu and the Wu Brothers grew up on Peach Blossom Island. In summer, they swam in the rough sea everyday so they were excellent in water. The three people said at the same time, "I'll come!" Wu Santong could also swim. Although not very well, he wasn't worried about this small creek and said, "I'll come too."

Huang Rong thought about how cruel and cold-blooded Li Mochou was. If she suddenly turned violent on them inside Gu Mu, Wu Santong and others wouldn't be able to defend themselves. She would have gone to watch over things herself but she just gave birth not long ago and was afraid to get sick from swimming in cold water. While hesitating, Yelu Qi said, "Guo Po Mu [Auntie Guo], you stay here to keep watch. I'll go along with Uncle Wu."

Huang Rong was delighted. This person was smart and skillful. His martial skills were also strong. With him going with the four people, she could put her mind at ease. She asked, "Do you have water skills?" Yelu Qi replied, "My swimming is not very good but I can manage diving." Huang Rong thought about something and asked, "Did you practice at the bottom of the ice?" Yelu Qi replied, "Yes, I did." Again Huang Rong asked, "Where did you practice it?" Yelu Qi explained, "When I was young, I lived with my father on the banks of the Gannan River for many years." Mongolia was bitterly cold. For most of the year, the Gannan River was covered in snow and ice. Among the Mongolian warriors, those extraordinarily strong would practice ice bottom diving by setting up a rule that the last one who got out on the ice surface would be the winner.

Seeing Li Mochou and others were ready and about to go down in the creek, Huang Rong didn't have time to say much. With a low voice, she said to Guo Fu, "People's hearts are difficult to measure. Be very careful!" She taught her daughter many times but this young girl was rash by nature. Repeated warnings were useless. Only by bumping herself against the wall many times, would she then learn a lesson.

The two girls, Yelu Yan and Wanyan Ping, didn't know how to swim so they stayed ashore with Huang Rong. Li Mochou led the way. She dove in the water at a cave entrance in the creek. Yelu Qi followed her closely. Guo Fu and the Wu father and brothers trailed behind.

Li Mochou led Yelu Qi and others diving into the creek undercurrent. The path at the bottom was sometimes wide and other times narrow. The undercurrent was alternately fast and slow. The water depths also vary from very deep to the waist-level. They went underwater for a long time and then finally arrived at the tomb entrance. Li Mochou proceeded to go inside. The five people followed in a line and

all thought, "If not for her leading the way, who would have thought there would be another world under the creek bottom?" By this time, although they were out of water, it was pitch black inside. The five people held hands so nobody would get lost. They then followed Li Mochou on the winding path ahead.

They walked for quite a while but sensed that they were getting to higher and dryer ground. Suddenly they heard a crunching sound. It was Li Mochou pushing open a stone door. The five people went inside and heard Li Mochou say, "We are already inside Gu Mu. Let's take a little break. Then we'll go find Yang Guo." Since entering Gu Mu, Wu Santong and Yelu Qi had stayed right behind Li Mochou's back, guarding themselves against her trickery. They couldn't even see the five fingers on their hands and had to rely on their ears, listening to everything with great attention. Guo Fu and the Wu brothers wanted to come to show their great courage but now that their eyes couldn't see a thing, they couldn't help but feel the thumping of their hearts.

Even if they used their weapons and sent out poisoned needles, they might not be able to avoid hurting their own people. Yelu Qi thought that if they let her lash out her secret weapons at random, the five of them would definitely be injured or killed. The only way out was to go forward to attack and not to give her a chance to launch her poisoned needles. Guo Fu thought the same thing. The two of them moved at the same time and threw themselves in the direction from which Li Mochou was making a noise.

Nobody could have expected this. As Li Mochou finished saying those three sentences, she took the opportunity to move quietly to another door. Yelu Qi and Guo Fu jumped out and started fighting; trying to catch each other's wrists and elbows to stop the opponent from launching secret weapons. The two exchanged four stances before Guo Fu felt that

something didn't feel right and let out an "eh" sound. Both Yelu Qi's hands were grabbing her two wrists. He felt that the flesh and skin were smooth and could smell a whiff of sweet scent in the air. Then he heard Guo Fu's crying out and became startled.

Then they heard a crushing sound of a stone door moving. Yelu Qi and Wu Santong cried out, "Oh, no!" and rushed forward to the nearby door. But there came 'Sou''Sou' whishing sounds. Two silver needles were shot out their way. The two people sidestepped to avoid the needles while extending their hands to push the stone door. That door was already closed. Pushing against it was just like trying to move a mountain. No matter how hard they tried, it wouldn't move.

Yelu Qi reached his hand out to feel the stone door from all directions but there was neither an iron hoop nor a door handle. He followed the wall and went around the room. Then he found out that the size of this stone chamber was about twenty square feet. The four-side walls were made of rough thick stones. He drew out his long sword and knocked the stone door several times. The sounds were dull, indicating that the door was extremely heavy. This stone door could be opened from the inside and only needed to be pulled open but it was most difficult with no place to pull to begin with. Guo Fu hurriedly said, "What are we going to do? Wouldn't we suffocate to death in here?" Yelu Qi heard her voice sounding like she was about to cry so he comforted her and said, "Don't worry. Guo Fu Ren [Madame Guo] is waiting for us outside. She'll definite have a plan to help us." Then he started groping at the walls, trying to find a way out.

Having trapped Wu Santong and others inside the stone chamber, Li Mochou was extremely pleased and mused, "These people can't get out. Shi Mei [Apprentice Sister] and Yang Guo didn't know I could swim and thought I wouldn't be able to sneak back in from the secret route. But where are

they?" She knew perfectly well that, to make her wish come true, she couldn't make even a bit of noise. Otherwise if they began to fight, she was afraid that she wouldn't be able to defeat them. Therefore, she took off her shoes and only left her stockings on. She held the Soul Freezing needles in both hands and slowly moved forward step-by-step.

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For the past few days, Xiao Longnu had been sitting on the chilled jade bed and circulating her energy flow according to the reverse energy flow principles. One by one, they cleared the thirty six pressure points on her body. Right now the two were working on Xiao Longnu's "Middle Altar" point. This was on her chest and a couple of inches below the "Jade Hall" point. The ancient medical text called this the "Sea of Air" because it regulated air in a human body and, as a result, was the most critical pressure point. The two people were in full concentration and didn't dare to be careless. Xiao Longnu felt the three pressure points "Purple Palace", "Flowery Roof", and "Jade hall" below her neck fill with hot air. But whenever the air reached the "Middle Altar" point, it wouldn't pass through. She knew that if she could clear this "Middle Altar" point, her body injury would be healed. But she only had to wait and couldn't force it. Xiao Longnu by nature had never been an anxious type. Time in Gu Mu was slow. If today she couldn't clear this pressure point, why couldn't she wait until tomorrow? So she alternated between stopping and continuing and had no worries in the least.

Yang Guo, however, was really impatient. He only wanted Xiao Longnu to recover soon so he could set his mind at ease. But he also knew that the matter of energy transfer couldn't be rushed. Adding the fact that they were using the reverse energy flow technique, how could it not be twice as difficult? Then he felt Xiao Longnu's pulse on her wrist was suddenly strong and suddenly weak. Even though they were not

fluctuating, it was not really a bad sign. He then slowly transferred the energy, adding more strength to it this time.

In this depth of lonely silence, he suddenly heard a 'ta' sound. This sound was extremely light. If not for Yang Guo's concentrating on his breath and the blank state of his mind, he wouldn't have heard it. A long time passed. There came another 'ta' sound, about three feet closer this time.

Yang Guo thought this was strange but he was afraid that he'd divert Xiao Longnu's attention. If she was distracted in a critical moment like this, at the very least it would be very difficult for her injury to ever recover and at the very most she could be killed instantly. How could there be any small mistakes? So even though in his heart he felt something not quite right, he feigned ignorance. But only a short while later, there was another 'ta' sound moving three feet closer. This time he knew that someone had entered Gu Mu through the water route and that that person didn't dare to barge in but just slowly moved forward. After another while, there came two light crunching sounds and then it stopped. These crunching sounds came from someone pushing open the stone door very, very slowly. If Xiao Long could manage to clear her "Middle Altar" point before the enemy got too near, it would be wonderfully lucky; otherwise it would be extremely dangerous. By this time they had already passed the point of no return. Even if they wanted to stop pushing the energy, they could not.

Then he heard a light 'ta' sound again, indicating that that person had just come one step closer. Yang Guo's mind was frantic but he didn't know what to do. Suddenly he felt his palm shaking and the heat energy was forced back to him because Xiao Longnu was also frightened. He quickly drew a breath and then pushed his internal energy out to Xiao Longnu's palm. In a low voice he said, "The terrors within can't be smelt, nor can they be seen. It is really the truth."

When one practiced martial arts to a certain limit, there would often emerge illusions, like hearing thundering cries or feeling itchy pains. One just had to know these were illusions and pay no attention to them whatsoever to avoid fire deviation. By this time, Yang Guo heard the footsteps very clearly and knew that it wasn't just his own imagination. But Xiao Longnu was at a life or death critical moment so he had lied to her, saying that it was her mind tricking her and that no matter how fiercely evil it was, she had to ignore it and it would just disappear. As Xiao Longnu heard these words, she immediately calmed herself down.

At this time, while the sun outside was glowing red, it was actually dark like late night inside Gu Mu. Yang Guo heard every single footstep, every time several feet nearer. He thought about how in this world, except for themselves husband and wife, there were only Li Mochou and Hong Lingbo who knew about the secret path under water. So it had to be them, master and disciple, coming in. Based on Yang Guo's martial skills, there was nothing to fear. It was only that he had to wait, not knowing for certain when the attack was coming. With this slow encroaching, he couldn't help but feel uncertain and anxious, not knowing how to defend himself. The more the enemy came closer, the more he felt like his heart was on fire. Great dangers were approaching step by step. His hands were tied, waiting for death. Beads of sweat slowly seeped out on his forehead. He thought, "On that day Guo Fu cut my arm off, despite the pain, at least the sword strike was swift. Being forced to endure a slow blow like this was actually much worse."

After another while, Xiao Longnu also heard the sound quite clearly and knew in her heart that it was not just an illusion. As danger was nearing, she wanted to increase the tempo of her inner air, pushing to clear her "Middle Altar" point. But her mind was slightly disturbed, causing her energy flow to go forwards and backwards and almost back up from her

chest. And during this time, she heard light footsteps. Then suddenly from the door came 'sou...sou' whishing sounds of four Soul Freezing Needles being shot her way.

At this moment Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were no different than average people with no martial skills whatsoever. Luckily, the two of them were prepared. Hearing the poisoned needles shot their way, they dropped backwards at the same time, without separating their palms. The four needles swiftly passed the sides of their faces. Li Mochou still hadn't figured out that they were circulating energy to heal an injury so she was afraid that they would counter-attack. So she immediately leapt backwards after sending out the poisoned needles. If she hadn't been afraid and followed up with another four needles, it would have been difficult for the two people to avoid getting hit.

Li Mochou only vaguely saw the two people sitting side by side on the Chilled Jade Bed. Missing her first strike, she herself was now quite worried. Seeing that Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu didn't get up to fight back, she still didn't understand but instead stepped back to the nearby stone door. With a fly whisk in her hand, she coldly said, "The two of you have been well since we last met!"

Yang Guo asked, "What do you want?" Li Mochou retorted, "How is it you don't know what I want?" Yang Guo continued, "You want the Jade Heart Manual, is that it? We've secluded ourselves inside Gu Mu, staying away from the outside world. Just go and take it." Li Mochou didn't know if she should believe him or not so she said, "Bring it!"

This Jade Heart Manual was engraved on the wall in another stone chamber. Yang Guo thought, "I'll just tell her the truth. The manual was obscure. Let her learn it by slowly pondering over it. We only need some more time for Gu Gu to clear her "Middle Altar" point. At that point, how would killing her be

difficult?” But right now Xiao Longnu’s pulses were wildly fluctuating and so she was leaning on Yang Guo, not saying anything.

Li Mochou widened her eyes to observe the two people carefully. In a dark blur, she saw Xiao Longnu stretching her palms out against Yang Guo’s. Her thoughts moved and then she immediately understood, “Yang Guo’s arm injury was heavy. And this little person was helping him healing the wound with her internal energy. I’ve arrived at the crucial moment during the energy transfer. If I don’t kill them both today, how would I have such a good opportunity like this afterwards?” Even though her deduction was only half right, the fear in her heart immediately disappeared. She jumped up and, with the fly whisk, bore down on top of Xiao Longnu.

Feeling a whiff of strong wind coming down on her and stirring up her neat hair, Xiao Longnu closed her eyes for the coming death. But Yang Guo opened his mouth and blew a gust of energy towards Li Mochou’s face. At this time his whole body strength was channeled to help Xiao Longnu’s clearing her pressure point so the force of air sent out from his mouth was not very strong. But seeing Xiao Longnu in a dangerous situation, he had to blow out air to disturb the enemy.

Li Mochou knew perfectly well that Yang Guo was full of tricks. But as she felt the heat licking her face, she was startled and leapt backwards a foot. After being defeated by Huang Rong’s wisdom, she’d always been extra careful everywhere, not being rash in trying to hurt the enemy but protecting her own body first. But after leaping back, her face felt nothing unusual. She then shouted, “You want to die?”

With a laugh Yang Guo said, “The other day I loaned you a robe, have you come today to return it?” Li Mochou thought

about the time she fiercely fought with the blacksmith Feng Mofeng and the clothes on her body were burned by the red-hot huge iron hammer. If not for Yang Guo's robe covering her body, she would have been shamefully distressed. Reasonably speaking, today she couldn't take the two people's lives. But after another consideration, she changed her mind. A moment of soft feelings like this would cause her to forever worry about them afterwards. She straightened up her body and slapped out her left palm.

Even in the face of this calamity, Yang Guo still fought for wisdom. He thought about how earlier he and Xiao Longnu were joking. He once said if both his arms had been cut off, she would have had to hold the soles of his feet instead. Then he heard the sound of wind made by a palm as Li Mochou's "Five Poisons Divine Palm" arrived. He had no time to think it over so he immediately lowered his head and lifted his feet up. At the same time he kicked out both feet to get rid of the shoes. He shouted, "Long'er, grab my feet!" and then wielded his left palm. With a 'Pa' sound, his palm made contact with Li Mochou's. Originally he'd passed his whole body strength through Xiao Longnu and right now the energy level was suddenly dropping. He forced out the energy again while matching Li Mochou's palm. All this while, Xiao Longnu was holding his right foot.

As Li Mochou suddenly saw Yang Guo's strange posture, she couldn't help being startled. But then she remembered the other day Yang Guo was fighting her own "Three Without Three Without Hands" strikes and no matter how he tried, he couldn't beat them. So she immediately increased the palm strength, trying to finish off Yang Guo. Years ago, when she'd used this "Five Poisoned Divine Palm" to slaughter the entire Lu Family, the palm was already incredibly fierce. Now that she had cultivated strength over the years, it became most violent and evil. As Yang Guo sensed the heat passing

through his palm, he didn't resist. Instead he added his own strength and passed the energy on to Xiao Longnu's body.

As it turned out, Li Mochou and Yang Guo's combined strength was helping Xiao Longnu clear her pressure point. Li Mochou's strategic moves were quite inferior to the Yang-Long couple but speaking of cultivated energy, hers was far deeper than theirs. Suddenly receiving such strong energy, Xiao Longnu felt the energy push vigorously through her "Middle Altar" point and that heat filled up her abdomen. Her spirits lifted and she called out, "Wonderful, many thanks to Shi Zi [Apprentice Elder Sister]!" She let go of Yang Guo's right foot and leapt down from the Chilled Jade Bed.

Li Mochou was surprised. She thought Xiao Longnu was helping Yang Guo heal his injury. So she lashed out her palm strength, thinking to use this opportunity to shock Yang Guo's energy flow. She hadn't expected that she would be helping the enemy instead. Delighted, Yang Guo turned his body around and stood there barefoot. With a laugh he said, "If not for you rushing in to help, your Shi Mei [Apprentice Younger Sister] wouldn't have been able to clear her "Middle Altar" point this easily." Li Mochou hesitated and didn't answer. Suddenly Xiao Longnu let out an 'Ah' sound. Holding her chest, she dropped down on the Chilled Jade Bed. With a start Yang Guo asked, "What is it?" Xiao Longnu panted, "Her, her, her palm was poisonous."

By now Yang Guo also felt dizzy in his head and realized that when Li Mochou used her "Five Poisons Divine Palm," she sent out the poisons from her palm. By matching palms with her, not only had the poisons entered his body, they also passed on to Xiao Longnu's.

Yang Guo lifted his black iron sword and shouted, "Quickly take out the antidote!" and chopped down his sword. Li Mochou lifted her fly whisk to protect herself. And with a

clang, the fly whisk forged from fine steel broke into two pieces. With its supple strength, this fly whisk had defeated who-knows-how-many great heroes in the world. But now that it was chopped and broken like it'd never been before, she was frightened to the core and hurriedly leapt out of the stone chamber. Yang Guo lifted his sword to pursue and wielded out his left arm. He saw that Li Mochou couldn't hold herself against this sword. But all of a sudden the poisons in his body acted up and he saw stars before his eyes. His arm went limp and painful, with no strength left, with a 'Dang' sound, the black iron sword dropped down on the floor.

Li Mochou didn't dare to stop. She fled ten feet ahead and then eventually turned her head back, only to see Yang Guo was shaking violently with his hand against the wall. She thought, "This boy's martial skills are extremely strange. I'll wait for a bit for the poisons to bring him down. Then I'll approach."

Yang Guo's throat was dry and painful. His head felt swollen and aching. He immediately passed strength to his left arm and waited for Li Mochou to come forward. Just one strike would kill her and his palm was holding firm the handle of the black iron sword. Li Mochou became frightened again and didn't dare to approach recklessly. By her calculation, she'd stay where she couldn't be defeated. And she stood there, carefully observing any change.

Yang Guo thought that if it dragged on like this, the poisons in his and Xiao Longnu's body would become stronger. With this delay, the enemy would have the upper hand. So he took a deep breath and circulated his internal flow. When the dizziness stopped, he grasped the handle of the black iron sword and stood up. He extended his arm to hold Xiao Longnu's waist and bellowed, "Make way!" and went out in big strides. Seeing his confident air, Li Mochou didn't dare to stop him.

Yang Guo only wanted to get into another stone chamber and close the door so Li Mochou couldn't follow in. Xiao Longnu had already cleared her pressure points and, in another while, the two of them could force out the poisons in their bodies. This matter was actually a hundred times easier than clearing the pressure points. When Yang Guo was young and was poisoned by Li Mochou's needles, Ouyang Feng taught him how to expel the poisons. At present the two of them had internal energy like this so getting rid of the poisons was really not difficult.

Li Mochou also knew his intention. How could she allow the two people to begin driving out the poisons? She didn't dare to attack and only kept following them from a safe distance, always five feet away from Yang Guo. When Yang Guo stood there and waited for her to come. She also merely stood there motionless.

In his chest, the more Yang Guo's heart beat, the fiercer the poisons became. He felt as if his heart would spill out of his mouth and couldn't really support himself again. He unsteadily dashed into a stone chamber and put Xiao Longnu down on a tabletop. He propped himself against the table and loudly gasped for breath. He knew perfectly well that Li Mochou would follow shortly after but didn't pay attention. After a little while, he then realized that they'd arrived at the coffin chamber. And the table, that he was propping himself against and that he was just placed Xiao Longnu's body on, was really a stone coffin.

At the time Li Mochou was a disciple of the sect, she'd lived here at Gu Mu for quite a long time. And even though her knowledge of Gu Mu secret matters was inferior to the Yang-Long couple's, she could see clearly that there were five stone coffins in the chamber. At the bottom of one of the coffins was a door to the secret path, from where she came in.

She thought, "Are you thinking about escaping from here? This time it may not be so easy."

Of the three people, one was sitting; one was standing; and the other was leaning against another. At this time, only the sounds of Yang Guo's heavy breathings could be heard. Yang Guo's body swayed several times. And with a clanking sound, the black iron sword dropped to the floor. Then he tumbled down Xiao Longnu's body. His hand threw out something. A 'Pa' sound was heard as that thing flew into an empty coffin. He called out, "Li Mochou, I can't let this Jade Heart Manual fall into your hands. Aiyo..." With a long miserable cry, he became motionless."

There were five stone coffins in this chamber. Three of them contained the bodies of Lin Chaoying, her disciple, and Sun Po Po [Grandma Sun]. The other two were actually empty. Of these two, one was a door to the secret passage and its lid was left two feet open so people could come in and go out. The other coffin's lid was left open just a little. As Li Mochou saw Yang Guo throw the "Jade Heart Manual" in this empty coffin, she was pleasantly surprised. But she was still afraid that it would be a trick. Another while passed and he was still motionless. So she bent down to feel his cheek. It was icy cold, meaning he was already dead. With a loud 'Ha-Ha' she said, "Little rascal, even with all your wickedness you also have failed today!" Then she stretched out her hand into the coffin to get the manual.

But Yang Guo had thrown the "manual" into the other end of the coffin. Li Mochou's fly whisk had earlier been broken; otherwise she could have used it to sweep it out. She used her arm to grope at it twice but still couldn't grab it. So she shrank her body and got into the empty stone coffin through this foot-wide opening. She crawled inside the stone coffin to the other end and finally grabbed the "manual." Her hand

then felt something not very wonderful. The manual appeared to be a shoe.

And by this time, Yang Guo lifted his body up. His left arm dashed out to the front, using the tip of the black iron sword to push the coffin lid. He sent out a ferocious force and the coffin lid was perfectly closed, trapping Li Mochou inside the coffin!

From the beginning, Li Mochou didn't know that the "Jade Heart Manual" was actually carved on the ceiling of a stone chamber and always thought it was a book. Yang Guo pretended to cry out in misery, throwing himself on Xiao Longnu's body. At the same time, he quickly took off his shoe and threw it into the empty coffin. A soft object landing on a stone sounded just like it was a book. After throwing in the shoe, he immediately reversed his energy flow and turned himself stiff like he was dead. In fact, even if he'd died of poisons, his body wouldn't have turned icy cold in the blink of an eye like this. When a man's pulse stopped, it would actually take at least half an hour for his whole body to lose all the heat. Li Mochou was so happy that she lost her power of observation. This plan of his was extremely dangerous. If Li Mochou didn't care if he'd actually died or not and struck his head with her "Five Poisons Divine Palm" to guarantee his death, his playing dead would unavoidably change into real death. But he was in a desperate situation so he took a desperate measure, hoping for some luck. To his surprise, it was actually a success.

To push a coffin lid, Yang Guo passed the strength to his left arm and then used his heavy sword to lift it up. Then he shouted, "Up!" and the other empty coffin was raised. A thundering 'Peng' sound followed and the coffin crushed down on top of the first coffin. This coffin and lid together weighed six hundred catties at least. Adding the bamboo top on the lid, it was extremely secure, with a perfect seam. Even

if Li Mochou's martial skills were high, there was no way she could get out in any case.

After being poisoned, Yang Guo's heart was beating fast and his head was hurting. But as they were facing a great enemy, he couldn't allow himself to be dizzy and entirely relied on his fierce determination to sustain himself. Having used the sword twice to push the coffins, his mind was tired and his strength depleted. He flung down the black iron sword and struggled to walk over to Xiao Longnu's side. Using the method of Ouyang Feng, he first drove out most of the poisons in his body. Then he reached out his hand to match Xiao Longnu's and helped her get rid of the poisons.

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Guo Fu, Yelu Qi, and the others were trapped in the stone chamber. These people entered the secret passage from the bottom of the creek and the fire kits they carried inside were all soaked and hence difficult to catch fire. They groped around in darkness. How could they possibly find a way out? The five people were at their wits' end so they just sat there idly on the floor.

Wu Santong was incessantly cursing Li Mochou's treacherously evil trick. Guo Fu, who was already extremely anxious, heard Wu Santong's non-stop scolding and became agitated. She couldn't bear to keep her mouth shut and so she said, "Wu Bobo [Uncle Wu], you knew before that Li Mochou was treacherous and evil, how come you didn't guard against her? What use is cursing when the damage is done?" Wu Santong was startled and couldn't say anything in response.

Since the Wu brothers had met Guo Fu again, each was sick at heart. While with the Yelu siblings and Wanyan Ping, everybody was having a good time together but they didn't really have a chance to talk to Guo Fu directly. This time Wu

Xiuwen heard her snapping at his father. He couldn't bear it and said, "We came to Gu Mu to help your little sister and unfortunately met with a disaster. Everybody is about to perish together and you still let out your lady's temper..." He was about to continue but then Wu Dunru called out, "Di di! [younger brother!]" This time Wu Xiuwen shut up. He spoke out of irritation. But after the words were uttered, he even greatly surprised himself. He'd always complied with Guo Fu's every wish and in no way would dare to cross her in the slightest. Who would have thought that today he would unexpectedly rebuke her in a severe tone like this?

Guo Fu was also startled. She was going to back talk but couldn't think of anything to say. She thought about how she would definitely die a sad death inside Gu Mu and from now on wouldn't be able to see her parents again. Her heart was aching. In the darkness nobody could see anything so she let out a whimpering cry. Hearing her crying, Wu Xiuwen felt sorry and said, "Okay, what I said was wrong. I apologize." Guo Fu sobbed, "What good is an apology?" and cried even harder. She pulled up a piece of cloth that was by her hand to blow her nose. Then she realized that she was leaning against someone's leg and the cloth she used to wipe her nose was shockingly that person's gown.

Guo Fu was alarmed and hurriedly sat up. She heard Wu Santong and his sons speaking and knew that the three people weren't by her side. That left only Yelu Qi who had been keeping silent. So the person naturally was him. Her face reddened and she babbled, "I..."

Yelu Qi suddenly said, "Listen, what is that sound?" The four people tilted their heads to listen but couldn't hear anything. Yelu Qi said, "Hmm, it is a baby crying. Guo Guniang [Miss Guo] that must be your little sister." This sound traveled through a stone wall and was particularly feeble. If not for his cultivated internal strength that heightened his aural senses,

he wouldn't have been able to hear it. As he got up and walked a few steps, the crying sound immediately weakened. He figured out, "Since the baby's cry can pass through, this stone chamber must have a ventilation space." Immediately he concentrated on listening, trying to identify where the cry came from.

He walked a few steps to the west, the crying sound slightly weakened. He turned back to the east, the crying was louder. Then he dashed towards the northeast and heard the sound quite clearly. So he walked to the northeast corner and extended his sword to hit the stone wall lightly. The 'kong-kong-kong' sounds were slightly different as if the wall there was especially thin. He sheathed his sword and used both palms to push out against the stones but nothing moved. He took a deep breath and sent his strength to both palms, using the "stick" technique. The strength was sent out, making a crashing sound. That stone chunk was indeed drawn out by the strength of his palm and fell on the ground.

Guo Fu and the others were pleasantly surprised. They cheered out loud in one voice and scrambled forwards to pull out three chunks of stone. This time a body could pass through and the people got out one by one. Following the sound, they entered a small stone chamber. In the darkness, Guo Fu heard that baby crying out extremely loudly and stretched her hand out to hug her immediately.

This baby was of course Guo Xiang. As Yang Guo was helping Xiao Longnu to clear her pressure points and also fighting with Li Mochou, he missed the baby's feeding time, causing her to cry out fiercely. Guo Fu did all she could to coax the baby, both patting and rocking her. But Guo Xiang, with someone holding her, cried even harder. Guo Fu ran out of patience and gave her to Wu Santong. She said, "Wu Bobo [Uncle Wu], please take a look what's wrong with her."

Yelu Qi traced his hand on a table and found a candle, along with a knife and flint. He immediately lit the candle. These people had been in the gloomy darkness for a very long time. Now there was light. They were all overjoyed and cried out in delight.

Wu Santong actually had sons. Hearing Guo Xiang crying like this, he knew that she was hungry. On the table, he saw the fine bee honey water and a small wood-carved spoon so he scooped up the honey water to feed her. As it passed through her mouth, Guo Xiang stopped crying as expected. Yelu Qi laughed and said, "If not for little Miss Guo's crying out from hunger, I'm afraid we'd all have died in that stone chamber."

Wu Santong bitterly said, "We'd better go find Li Mochou." Then each person broke off the legs of the table and chairs and lit the fire to make torches to be used on their way. At every corner, Wu Dunru used his sword tip to make a mark for fear that they would get lost on their way back.

As the five people entered a room, there was also another room. They raised their torches to search for Li Mochou's traces and saw that this ancient tomb was gigantic, with winding corridors and great many rooms. All were endlessly amazed. Nobody could have expected that a magnificent construction like this would be hidden above a small mountain creek. Then they entered Xiao Longnu's bed chamber and saw several "Soul Freezing Needles" lying on the floor. Guo Fu wrapped her hand with a piece of cloth and picked up two needles. She said, "This time I will return these poisoned needles to the evil witch."

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As Yang Guo used his internal energy to help Xiao Longnu expel the poisons, he saw dark liquid slowly seeping out from the five fingertips on her left hand. It would take a while to remove all the poison. Suddenly he heard the sound of

footsteps coming from the corridor. There were five people coming in total. Yang Guo was secretly startled and thought that the enemy always came to attack at every critical moment. Li Mochou alone had been difficult enough. How would he deal with five people? Xiao Longnu had just cleared her pressure points and her internal energy was weak. If the poisons weren't driven out immediately, they were bound to enter her pressure points and spread out. Suddenly he saw lights flashing from the distance. Those five people were moving closer. Yang Guo then reached out his arm to carry Xiao Longnu and then jumped onto the empty coffin that was on top of Li Mochou. He pushed open the coffin lid with his palm.

The two people were hiding in the coffin when Yelu Qi and the others came in. Seeing that there were five coffins in the room, the five people became startled, faintly feeling that this was too big a coincidence and a bad omen. Guo Fu couldn't bear it and said, "Hmmp, there are five of us here and there are five coffins!"

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu inside the stone coffin heard Guo Fu's voice. Puzzled, they thought, "How come she's here?" Yang Guo's left hand had never left Xiao Longnu's palm, still forcing out the poisons. He heard that Guo Fu was among the five people. Even though surprised, he was relieved, thinking that she wouldn't dare to take advantage of someone in a precarious situation. So he said nothing and kept concentrating on sending out his energy to expel the poisons.

Yelu Qi already heard the breathing sound from the stone coffin and thought it was Li Mochou who hid in there with a devious trick. This time he wouldn't be fooled again and so he immediately made a hand signal, calling the four people to surround the coffin. Guo Fu noticed that the coffin lid and the coffin itself were not aligned and she could see the hem

of a gown through the crack. She concluded that it was Li Mochou hiding in there. She laughed and thought, "I'm going to pay you back in your own coin!" She used her energy to push the coffin lid with her left palm and then fiercely shot out the two "Soul Freezing Needles".

These two needles were sent out at close range. Also, there was no room in the coffin to move aside. The Yang Long couple cried out in surprise, "Ayo!" One needle hit Yang Guo's right leg while the other struck Xiao Longnu's left shoulder.

Having sent out the needles, Guo Fu was very pleased with herself. But then she actually heard the surprised cries from a man and a woman inside the coffin. Her heart jumped and she also let out an 'Ayo' cry. Yelu Qi kicked out his left leg. There came a crashing sound while the coffin lid fell down on the floor. Trembling, Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu stood up. Under the torch lights, the two people's faces were pale as they sadly looked at each other.

Guo Fu didn't know that this time she herself had created a bigger disaster than cutting off Yang Guo's arm and only felt slightly sorry. She said apologetically, "Yang Da ge [Big Brother Yang], Long Zi Zi [Elder Sister Long], little sister didn't know it was you two and accidentally shot out the needles. Luckily, my mother has the antidote to this poison. Years ago, my pet eagles were injured by Li Mochou's needles and it was mother who cured them. Why were you hiding inside the coffin? Who would have thought it was the two of you?"

She thought about how she herself had cut off Yang Guo's arm and how he'd bent her sword. She figured that they were about even. Let alone the fact that her mother had already scolded her vehemently for this. She mused, "I didn't come to blame you. That should be enough." She'd always had the upper hand since childhood. Others looked up to her parents

and always gave in to her. Therefore, she only thought about herself and didn't take other people into consideration. Speaking in retrospect, the Yang-Long couple was not supposed to be hiding in the coffin and therefore gave her a fright. She would not have thought that at the time Xiao Longnu was hit by the silver needle, the poisons inside her body had just stopped flowing out. Suddenly she was violently hit like this, the poisons from the "Five Poisons Divine Palm" all flew backwards, entering the major pressure points on her whole body. This time even if there were a divine pill of immortality, there wouldn't have been a way to save her. Li Mochou's silver needle inflicted no more than a flesh wound and, with a proper treatment, one could be cured. However, the poisons inside her were severe beyond reason.

Xiao Longnu was still for a moment but then she felt as if her chest was empty like there was nothing inside and her heart went missing. Then she turned her head to look at Yang Guo and saw in his eyes heartache, a combination of grief and indignation. His whole body was trembling. He looked as if the lifetime of sadness and abuse all came out at this time. Xiao Longnu couldn't bear to see him bitter and miserable like this so she gently said, "Guo'er, our destiny is like this. Let's not resent other people. Don't be so bitter." She then stretched out her hand to pull out the silver needle from his leg and then later the other poisoned needle from her shoulder. Unlike the "Five Poisons Divine Palm" that Li Mochou had created herself, the "Soul Freezing Needles" were passed on by her ancestor master and so she carried the antidote with her. She gave Yang Guo one grain and she herself took another. Filled with immense hatred, Yang Guo made a sound and spat out the antidote onto the ground.

Guo Fu angrily said, "Ayo, very big of you. Is this to say I came here to harm you on purpose? I did apologize and that should be enough. What's with the temper? They were only

two small needles. What's a big deal?" Wu Santong saw the sad expression on Yang Guo's face gradually concealed and replaced by a rising anger. He also saw him picking up the shiny big black sword from the ground. Knowing something was not right, he quickly went forward and coaxed, "Yang Xiong di [Brother Yang], please don't be upset. The five of us were trapped inside a stone chamber by Li Mochou and escaped with great difficulty. Guo Guniang [Miss Guo] was rash, mistaking.. .."

Guo Fu butted in, "What? Was I rash? You yourself also thought it was Li Mochou. If not, why haven't you said something?" Wu Santong eyed Yang Guo and then looked at Guo Fu, not knowing how to appease them.

Xiao Longnu took out another grain of antidote and in a low voice she said, "Guo'er, take the antidote. Don't you listen to my words anymore?" Hearing Xiao Longnu's gentle urge, Yang Guo opened his mouth and swallowed. He thought about how the two of them wrestled with life and death with difficulty for the last few days and how finally it was all for nothing. He couldn't bear it any longer and suddenly knelt down to loudly cry on the stone coffin.

Wu Santong and the others looked at one another in blank dismay. All were thinking that he had always been extremely strong and full of spirit. How come today, after being hit by just a small needle, he was weeping so bitterly like this?

Xiao Longnu reached out her hand to stroke Yang Guo's hair and said, "Guo'er, you tell them to go. I don't like them in here." The plain sentence "I don't like them in here" contained all her hatred and resentment.

Yang Guo stood up. His eyes began with Guo Fu and then scanned the people one by one. Even though he was extremely angry and hateful, he eventually realized that Guo Fu's launching the silver needles was an inadvertent mistake.

Except blaming her for being rash, he couldn't say she was wrong. Let alone the fact that even if he used the sword to split her open, he still wouldn't be able to save Xiao Longnu's life. He picked up his sword with rage in his eyes. Suddenly he raised his black iron heavy sword and there came a thundering sound and flying sparks. Surprisingly he only chopped the stone coffin they were hiding in earlier into two sections. This strike was executed not only out of male strength, but also out of bottomless grief and indignation.

Seeing his strike to be this incredibly powerful, Guo Fu and the others couldn't help becoming startled. They saw with their own eyes how thick and heavy the coffin was. It was chiseled from granite. To break it into two pieces, a stone mason using a big axe to cut it for half a day still wouldn't be able to do it. If Yang Guo had used a large mountain-cutting axe or a thick machete, it might have been conceivable. But long swords were originally light and quick weapons, which were treasured for their sharp blades. If colliding with a solid stone like this, they would immediately snap. Who would have thought that this sword could cut through a stone like it was clay. As soon as the blade dropped, the coffin broke.

Yang Guo saw the five people looking at each other in alarm. He then fiercely bellowed, "What did you come here for?" Wu Santong answered, "Yang Xiong di [Brother Yang], we followed Guo Fu ren [Madame Guo] to come look for you."

Yang Guo angrily retorted, "You came here to bring back her daughter, didn't you? To get this little baby, you were willing to kill my dear wife."

Wu Santong was startled and said, "Kill your dear wife? Ah, that is Long Guniang [Miss Long]." Then he noticed that Xiao Longnu was wearing a bridal gown and immediately understood. He quickly said, "Your wife was hit by a poisoned

needle. Guo Fu ren [Madame Guo]'s got the antidote. She is just outside."

Yang Guo made a spitting sound and shouted, "You people came in to cause ruckus like this, the poisons in her body turned to attack all her major pressure points. What would Guo Fu ren [Madame Guo] do? Does she have the skill to bring back the dead?"

Wu Santong owed Yang Guo for saving his sons and therefore was extremely respectful of him. Although hearing him lashing out an accusation like this, he didn't think to be defiant in the least bit. He only mumbled, "The poisons turned to attack all her major pressure points. This is not good."

From the side, Guo Fu was getting mad. She heard Yang Guo speaking disrespectfully of her mother and flew into a rage. She shouted, "What has my mother done to you? At the time you were young, you were homeless. Wasn't it my mother who sheltered you? She fed you. You... Hmmph.. Instead, you turned out to be ungrateful and stole my little sister." By this time, she already knew that even though her sister fell into Yang Guo's hand, he had no evil intention. But as she was in a verbal fight with him, she didn't think about what could or couldn't be said and brought up this issue.

Yang Guo sneered and said, "Right, today I am ungrateful. You said I stole this child. I'll take her and never return her. How will you catch me?" Guo Fu tightened her left arm and firmly held her little sister. With her right arm, she raised the torch high to block the front part of her body.

Wu Santong anxiously said, "Yang Xiong di [Brother Yang], your wife has been poisoned. We must soon detoxify the poisons..."

Yang Guo bitterly responded, "Wu Xiong [Brother Wu], it's useless." Suddenly he let out a long, loud roar and sent out his right sleeve. Guo Fu and the others all sensed a gust of wind blowing their way and their faces felt burning hot and painful like being scraped by a blade. The five torches were blown out and so the place immediately turned pitch black. They gave out a loud 'Ayo!' cry. Yelu Qi was afraid that Yang Guo would hurt her so he jumped forward, only to hear Guo Xiang's wailing from outside of the stone chamber. They were all alarmed. The wailing sound was already 20 or 30 feet away. They were moving fast, just like spirits.

Guo Fu cried out, "He snatched my little sister." Wu Santong called out, "Yang Xiong di [Brother Yang]... Long Guniang [Miss Long]! Yang Xiong di...Long Guniang!" But there was no one to answer him. They had no light and in the darkness couldn't see what was going on.

Yelu Qi said, "We must get out of here quickly. Don't let him close us in here."

Wu Santong indignantly said, "Yang Xiong di [Brother Yang] was very kind and very righteous, why did he do this?"

Guo Fu retorted, "His being kind and righteous... We should go quickly. What are we waiting here for?" Having said those few words, she suddenly heard two 'ka-ka' sounds from inside a stone coffin. And since the sounds were muffled by the coffin lid, they appeared really melancholy.

"There's a ghost!" Guo Fu screamed, pulling Yelu Qi's arm which was nearby. Wu Santong and the others clearly heard that the sounds came from inside the coffin as if a corpse was scrambling to get out. In the darkness, everybody was absolutely terrified.

Yelu Qi said to Wu Santong in a low voice, "Wu Shushu [Uncle Wu], you stay here. I'll go over there. If a corpse

comes out, we'll use our four palms to beat him to pulp. Then he grasped Guo Fu by her wrist and pulled her to stand behind his body for fear that the ghost would harm people.

Then they heard a sudden sound of something flying out of the coffin. Wu Santong and Yelu Qi had earlier prepared to send out their energy. As they heard the whooshing sound, they lashed out their strikes. When the two people's hands made contact with that thing, they together cried out, "Wretched!" What they actually hit was a chunk of long stone, which was laid in the coffin as a stone pillow. The two people used their whole strength in the attack. As that stone chunk was fiercely hit, it dropped onto the stone coffin and smashed it into flying fragments. The stone pillow itself split into several pieces. At the same time, there was another whooshing sound of something flying past them. Wu Santong and Yelu Qi were about to raise their palms to attack again but that thing had already floated away from them. They heard a 'hei-hei' cold laugh and then immediately came a bleak silence.

"Li Mochou!" Wu Santong said with a start. Guo Fu cried out, "No that was the corpse! How would Li Mochou be inside the coffin?" Yelu Qi let out a groan with his mouth hanging open. He didn't believe that there were ghosts in the world but to think that it was Li Mochou was actually quite unreasonable. Obviously she and he came in together while Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu had actually been inside Gu Mu for many days. How could she be right under the Yang Long couple's coffin? Wu Santong said, "Then where has Li Mochou gone to?" Yelu Qi said, "Everything inside the tomb is becoming weird. Let us get out of here first." Guo Fu asked, "What should we do about my little sister?" Wu Santong then said, "We ran into a dead end but your mother will surely have a great plan. Let's go out and ask her what to do."

So the people searched for the way out and returned to the mountain creek. From under the water, all they saw was red. The woods on both sides of the creek had caught fire and hot steam was attacking them. Horrified, Guo Fu called out, “Ma, Ma!” but didn’t hear any reply. Suddenly on the bank a big burning tree toppled down. Yelu Qi pulled her up and quickly jumped upstream, just in time to dodge the danger. It was deep winter at this time of year and all the plants were dried out and withering. So the mountain became a sea of fire. Even though the five people were soaked in the middle of the creek, the big fires were encroaching and their faces felt boiling hot.

Wu Santong said, “The Mongolian army must have been attacking the Chongyang Palace. They suffered defeat and then set fire to the mountain to vent their anger.

Guo Fu worriedly cried out: “Ma...Ma! Where are you?” Suddenly on the left side of the creek she saw a woman’s figure skipping around to avoid the flames. “Ma, Ma! She cried out in delight and jumped up from the water to rush ahead. “Be careful!” Wu Santong called out after her and there suddenly came chaotic ‘ka-la’ sounds. Two big trees fell down, blocking his view.

Guo Fu rushed through the smoke and fire. At this time she was still in the water. First she thought about her mother. Second, she just came out of the darkness inside Gu Mu and into the sudden brightness. Her eyes couldn’t adjust and so she couldn't see things very clearly. As she got closer, she then realized that the back side of that figure didn’t seem right. She became nervous. And when that person turned her body around it was, unexpectedly, Li Mochou.

Earlier Li Mochou was trapped under the stone coffin by Yang Guo and had no way to get out. But afterwards Yang Guo struck the top coffin out of anger, causing the coffin lid below

to also crack. She therefore escaped death by throwing out the stone pillow and leaping out after it.

Even though she was confined inside the coffin for less than an hour, she got a taste of what it was like being suffocated to death inside a coffin, which was truly the most painful and miserable situation. During this short period of time, she clenched her jaws, detesting every living person in the world. She thought to herself, "After I die, I must become an evil spirit. I will kill Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu, Wu Santong, Huang Rong.. .." Not discriminating who it was, all she wanted was to kill everybody. Although she could escape by luck later, the hatred in her heart was actually not lightened. Suddenly seeing Guo Fu, she let out a smile and gently said, "Guo Guniang [Miss Guo], it's you. The fires are burning with such ferocity. You must be careful."

Guo Fu saw her friendly expression and was quite relieved. So she asked, "Did you see my mother?" Li Mochou moved a few steps closer and pointed to the left. She said, "She went that way, didn't she?" Guo Fu looked towards the direction she just pointed. Li Mochou suddenly closed in and reached out to seal a pressure point below her waist. With a laugh she said, "Don't worry. Your mother will come to look for you." She saw that the fires were nearing from all directions. If she was delayed again, her own life would be in danger. She jumped up and took off towards the west. Guo Fu was left paralyzed on the ground, only hearing the chilling sound of Li Mochou's singing from behind the violent flames. She sang, "I ask the world. What is this love that makes people live and die for?"

The singing gradually faded away and the wind suddenly blew a thick plume of smoke, enveloping Guo Fu. She couldn't move her limbs and so, choking in the smoke, she coughed loudly. The Wu father and sons and Yelu Qi were standing midstream, with burning ashes falling on their heads. Between the small creek and Guo Fu was a raging fire

twenty feet high. They knew perfectly well that Guo Fu was in imminent danger but if they were to go in and rescue her, they would only accompany her in death and so they couldn't come up with a plan to save her.

In the smoke Guo Fu was disoriented and about to faint. She was so frightened that she couldn't even cry out. Suddenly she heard someone's shouting from the east side so she turned her head, only to see a whirlwind that wrapped around a gray shadow coming towards her. Wherever the spinning wind passed through, the fire would split open into two sections. That whirlwind reached her in just a short while. The shadow inside was of course Yang Guo. Guo Fu originally thought it was someone coming to rescue her and was delighted. But then she clearly saw that it was actually Yang Guo. Even though it was broiling hot outside, in her heart she felt as if she was drenched with cold water. She thought to herself, "I'm about to die and now he had to come to ridicule and humiliate me." After all she was the daughter of Guo Jing and Huang Rong so she just viciously stared at Yang Guo and surprisingly was not afraid in the least bit.

Yang Guo rushed to her side and thrust out his sword. It was placed at the area below her waist. "Be careful!" He shouted and wielded out his left arm. With his vigorous internal energy sending through the black iron sword, Guo Fu felt like she was riding a cloud while flying away in midair. She went over ten big trees that were burning and sending flames into the sky. And then with a splash, she fell into the creek. Yelu Qi quickly rushed forward to support her and unseal her pressure point. Guo Fu was confused and disoriented. And after a while, she was weeping like a baby.

When Yang Guo first brought Xiao Longnu and Guo Xiang out of the tomb they saw the Mongolian soldiers setting fire to the mountain. The Yang-Long couple had spent a great many years together among these big trees and flowers. Suddenly

seeing the fires, they felt great pain and regret. But the army was big and powerful and they had no way to fight them. Yang Guo didn't know how long Xiao Longnu would last after the poisons had entered her major pressure points so he found a small cave covered with thatches to hide in temporarily.

A short while passed. From the distance they saw Guo Fu hurt by Li Mochou and the raging fires were about to burn her body. Yang Guo said, "Long'er, this girl not only harmed me, but also had hurt you. Today, she's finally getting what she deserves."

With a bright glow in her eyes, Xiao Longnu gazed at him and asked in bewilderment, "Guo'er, are you saying you aren't going to save her?"

Yang Guo bitterly replied, "She's hurt us like this and yet I'm not killing her with my own hand. I'm already doing right by her parents."

With a sigh Xiao Longnu said, "We are unfortunate. That is our sad fate. If we could make other people happy, wouldn't that be wonderful?"

Despite Yang Guo's saying all these things, when seeing that the big fires were about to reach Guo Fu, he eventually couldn't bear it and harshly said, "Great! Our fate is sad. Everybody else's is fine!" Then he soaked the long gown on his body and strapped on the black iron sword. He quickly conjured up his internal energy and from the sword created a whirlwind that blew away the raging fires. Then he sent Guo Fu out of danger. After that he returned to Xiao Longnu's side. The hair on his head and his gown were all singed by the fire. His pants were on fire and even though he quickly put it out, the burned areas on his legs already had countless blisters.

Xiao Longnu was carrying Guo Xiang and they retreated to the thatches they were hiding in earlier. While she stretched out her hand to tidy Yang Guo's hair and clothes, she felt that she had married such a heroic husband. She couldn't restrain the pride in her heart. Standing in between the strong winds and the roaring flames, she leaned on Yang Guo and her face revealed a peaceful and joyous expression. Yang Guo focused his eyes on her, only to see that the big flames were bringing red to her cheeks, multiplying her delicate beauty and so he placed his arm around her waist. During this slice of time, the two people conveniently forgot all the sufferings and sorrows in the world.

Two people were standing on a high place. The Wu father and sons, Guo Fu and Yelu Qi five people, who were standing in the middle of the creek to avoid the fires, looked up and saw the married couple, with floating clothes and solemn postures. They looked just like deities among mortals. Guo Fu had always looked down on Yang Guo but this time she suddenly felt inferior.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu stood there for a moment. Xiao Longnu gazed at the blazing fires on the mountain. She sighed and said, "This place is being burned to the ground. It will take a long time for the flowers, plants, and trees to grow back. Do you think in the future this will ever be a beautiful scene again?"

Yang Guo didn't want her to feel bad about these things so with a smile he said, "We are newly wed. The Mongolian army set fires to congratulate us. How would they not use tons and tons of flowers as candles? Xiao Longnu giggled. Yang Guo then said, "Let's go rest in that cave. How do you feel?" Xiao Longnu replied, "I'm still okay." Then, side by side, the two people walked off towards the back side of the mountain.

Wu Santong suddenly remembered something. He raised his voice and called out, "Yang Xiong di [Brother Yang], my master and Zhu Shi di [Apprentice Brother Zhu] have been trapped in the Passionless Valley [Jue Qing Gu]. Are you going to go and rescue them?"

Yang Guo was startled and didn't reply. He spoke to himself, "How am I involved in these many things?" He was deep in thought but for a while his feet didn't stop. They walked to the back side of the mountain where it was all rocky and nothing grew. Although Xiao Longnu's poisons were severe, they were yet to act up. Her pressure points had earlier been cleared so her martial skills were gradually coming back. With Guo Xiang in her arms, she walked quickly along the way. After walking for half an hour, the two people were already far away from the Chongyang Palace. When they turned their heads to look back, the big fires were burning so intensely that half the sky was glowing red.

The north wind was blowing more and more heavily. It was so cold that Guo Xiang's small face became red like an apple. Xiao Longnu said, "We must go look for something to eat. The child is both cold and hungry. I'm afraid that she won't be able to stand it."

Yang Guo then said, "I was really foolish. I don't know why I snatched the baby and caused us an unnecessary burden."

Xiao Longnu bent down to kiss Guo Xiang's face and said, "This little sister is very lovable. Don't you like her?"

Yang Guo laughed and said, "What's so special about other people's children? Of course except we make one ourselves."

Xiao Longnu's face turned red. Yang Guo's words touched a mother's instinct deep in her heart. She thought to herself, "Only if I could give you a child... Alas, how would I have such a good fortune?"

For fear that she would be sad; Yang Guo didn't dare to look her in the eyes. Instead, he lifted his head to check the weather and then saw that the northwest sky was low and heavy as if it would crush down any minute. He said, "Looks like today it will snow heavily. We'd better stay overnight in someone's home." When they were evading the fires, they walked down the back side of the mountain to a remote and uncultivated no-road area that was filled with scattered rock piles and thorny bushes. They climbed up to the high ground and looked in all directions. Unexpectedly there was no smoke from a house within a ten li radius. Yang Guo said, "The snow definitely won't be light. If we get snowed in on the mountain, that could be pretty bad. Let's push a little harder. Today we must get off the mountain."

Then Xiao Longnu asked, "Do you think Uncle Wu and Guo Guniang [Miss Guo] will run into the Mongolian army? And could the Taoist priests from the Quanzhen sect get away with their lives?" While saying this, she was genuinely concerned about these people.

Yang Guo said, "Your conscience is really too good. These people have wronged you and yet you still don't forget all about them. No wonder years ago your master realized that your conscience was too good. Afraid that you'd be miserable later on, she had you practice cutting off all emotions and desires, not involving yourself in all matters. Yet you've been caring for me, wasting your over ten years practice. You are also concerned about everybody."

Xiao Longnu faintly smiled and said, "Is that so? I've made your life miserable. In bitterness there is sweetness. My worst fear is that you wouldn't want me to be concerned about you."

Yang Guo said, "That's right. The more bitter... the sweeter. It's much better than no pain and no gain. I can be madly crazy but can't stand too many quiet and peaceful days."

Xiao Longnu giggled and said, "Didn't you say we'd go south to farm, raise some chickens, and enjoy the sun?"

Yang Guo sighed and said, "I only hope we can always be like this."

They walked for another several li and then the empty sky was filled with flying snow. At the beginning it was quite light but then the north wind gradually picked up and the more it snowed the heavier it became. The two people knew they couldn't set their minds at ease until after the blizzard; they used their lightness skills to rush ahead.

Xiao Longnu suddenly asked, "Guo'er, where do you think my shi zi [Apprentice Sister] has gone to?"

Yang Guo responded, "You are still worried about her. We didn't kill her this time and don't know... and don't know..." He originally was going to say "and don't know if we will be able to when we run into her again" but he was afraid that he'd give Xiao Longnu grief so he decided not to say it.

Xiao Longnu said, "Shi zi [Apprentice sister] is actually a very pitiful person."

Yang Guo said, "She isn't willing to be pitiful alone but is determined to make everybody in the world miserable like herself."

While they were saying this, the sky became even gloomier. But as they came around the corner of the mountain, they suddenly saw a tiny little wooden house between two big pine trees. Several inches of thick white snow were accumulated on its roof.

Yang Guo said in delight, "Great. Let us stop here tonight." They rushed forward but noticed that the door was left ajar, with no trail of footprints in the snow outside the house. In a clear voice he said, "We passers-by are out here in the snow. May we stay overnight at your place?" A while passed and there was no reply from inside the house.

Yang Guo pushed the door open and saw that there was no one inside. All the tables and benches were covered in dust, indicating that no one had occupied this place for a long time. He then called Xiao Longnu to enter the house. She shut the door and started a fire. A spear was hung on a wooden wall and there was a rabbit snare in one corner of the room. It looked like this place was a temporary hunting shack. In another room there was a bed, with several already tattered wolf skins piled on top. Yang Guo picked up the spear and went out to hunt a deer. He was successful and when he came back, he skinned and dressed it. He used the snow to scrub it clean and then roasted it over the fire.

During this time it snowed even harder outside. But the fire was burning bright inside the house, making it warm like spring. Xiao Longnu chewed the deer meat before feeding it to Guo Xiang. While flipping the meat back and forth over the fire, Yang Guo looked at the two of them with a smile.

The fire was gently crackling. The room was filled with the smell of roasted meat. The small shack on the wild mountain was indeed a warm and deliciously smelling world.

End of Chapter 29.

Chapter 30 - Strange Encounters

Translated by BeeDreamer



Zhou Botong grabbed Xiao Longnu with one arm and put her on the trunk. Ci'en was concentrating on rushing forwards for fear that Xiao Longnu would catch up with him, and so he was the only person who didn't know that there was another person behind him. Sitting on the trunk, Xiao Long Nu was both secure and comfortable, just like riding a horse.

Once again, this quiet and peaceful moment didn't last very long. Just a little while after Guo Xiang fell asleep, from the east came the distant crunching sounds of someone walking on the snow in quick steps. Yang Guo stood up and gazed out from the east side window. Then he saw two old men walking side by side on the snowy ground. One was fat, and the other was thin. And with their ragged clothes, they looked just like people from the Beggar Clan. Stranded in the snow, they had to be looking for a place to rest their feet. Yang Guo didn't want to meet any people at this time and specially detested those from Wulin [the martial world]. He turned around and said, "There are people outside. You should go lay in the bedroom, pretending to be sick." Xiao Longnu picked up Guo Xiang and went into the bedroom to lie down in bed as suggested. Then she pulled up a tattered wolf skin from the edge of the bed to cover her body.

Yang Guo scooped up some firewood ash and wiped it all over his face and neck. He pulled the hat lower over his face and hid his black iron sword inside a room. Then he heard the two people coming close and knocking on the door. He randomly smeared deer grease on his gown to make him look like a hunter and then went to open the door.

That fat old beggar said, "The snow is coming down heavily in the mountains. It is really miserable out here. May we ask the gentleman to let us beggars stay in your house tonight?"

Yang Guo replied, "We are just a hunting family. How could senior call me a gentleman? You may stay here for the night." That fat old beggar then thanked him profusely. Yang Guo recalled how he once displayed himself at a heroes meeting and didn't want to be recognized by them. So he ripped two strips of meat from the roasted deer leg, handed them to the two people, and said, "There are so many things to do to survive in the snow. I've got to get up early tomorrow to catch a fox. I'm afraid I can't keep you two company." The fat old beggar replied, "Please do as you please, little gentleman."

Then in a coarse tone Yang Guo said, "Old wife, how's your cough?" Xiao Longnu replied, "It's the weather change. My chest hurts." While saying that, she let out a loud cough and her hand gently shook Guo Xiang to wake her up. The sound of a coughing woman was mixed with that of a crying baby and so the three of them really presented a perfect picture of a hunting household.

Yang Guo walked into the bedroom and banged the door shut after him. He lay down in bed next to Xiao Longnu and thought to himself, "This fat beggar looks familiar. Where have I seen him before?" But he couldn't remember.

The fat and thin beggars thought that Yang Guo really was a poor hunter living on a wild mountain and didn't suspect anything. While eating the deer leg, they started talking. The thin beggar said, "Today Mount Zhongnan was blasted to the sky. That was well done." With a laugh the fat beggar added, "The Mongolian Royal Army is attacking from east to west and defeating all their enemies under the sky. Wiping out those little Quanzhen Taoists was as easy as crushing an ant nest." The thin beggar said, "But just recently Jinlun Fawang suffered quite a loss. That was difficult enough." The fat beggar laughingly said, "That's even better. It will let the prince know that he must depend on the Chinese to conquer

the beautiful homeland of China. Using only the Mongolians and the Western warriors isn't enough." The thin beggar then said, "Peng Zhang Lao [Elder Peng], when this business of establishing the Southern Beggar Clan is all done, how is the Mongolian emperor going to reward you?"

Having heard this, Yang Guo suddenly remembered something. He'd seen this old fat beggar at the Dashengguan hero banquet but at that time the beggar was dressed in Mongolian attire with a fur coat, and he was whispering advice to Jinlun Fawang. It was this person. So he thought to himself, "These two fellows are actually the country's traitors. I will just quickly get rid of them to avoid causing any disturbance here."

This fat old beggar was precisely one of the four big elders of the Beggar Clan, Peng Zhang Lao [Elder Peng], who had earlier fallen in with the Mongols. Yang Guo heard him continue, "The emperor will bestow on me the position of 'Chief General of the Southern Province' but, you know, they say 'Beg for three years and the emperor still might not see it.' We are members of the Beggar Clan. Why would we want to become a Government Official?" But while saying this, his tone actually revealed a fervent desire for the position.

The thin beggar said, "Let me congratulate you in advance." Peng Zhang Lao chuckled and said, "Your accomplishments during these many years are not lacking. Naturally, your own reward won't be small either."

That thin beggar said, "I don't wish to become a public official. You've promised to teach me the great 'Soul Absorbing Technique'. When will you pass it on to me?"

Peng Zhang Lao replied, "Wait until the Southern Beggar Clan is established and I become the chief of the clan. Both of us will have a lot of free time. Then I will definitely pass it on to you."

The thin beggar said, "By then you'll be the Chief of the Southern Beggar Clan and also the Mongolian Chief General of the Southern Province. You would only be even busier. How would you have any free time?"

With a laugh Peng Zhang Lao said, "Lao di [Old little brother], is that to say you still don't trust your big brother?" That thin beggar said nothing and snorted, showing that he didn't believe him.

Yang Guo thought to himself, "There's only one Beggar Clan in the world and it's never been divided into northern and southern sects. His planning to set up this Southern Beggar Clan must be a devious scheme to help the Mongols."

The thin beggar continued, "Peng Zhang Lao [Elder Peng], you've promised someone something. Sooner or later you've got to do it. You seniors keep putting things off, disappointing other people."

Peng Zhang Lao blandly asked, "What would you do then?"

The thin beggar retorted, "What would I do? My martial skills are low. My courage is small. I don't have any great skills. But I've been accompanying you, helping you deceive numerous sect brothers. Later on when Chief Huang and Chief Lu come to investigate, I think I'll tremble with fear and spill everything to wash my hands from this mud."

Yang Guo thought, "The thin beggar doesn't want to live. How could he dare say such thing? That Peng Zhang Lao has a lofty aspiration and an evil and cold-blooded nature. You're really both venomous and foolish."

Peng Zhang Lao let out a 'ha-ha' laugh and said, "We'll discuss this in time. You don't have to worry."

The thin beggar didn't say a word. But after a while he said, "One tiny deer leg is not filling. I'll go out and get more

food.” While saying that he took down the spear from the wall and pushed the door open.

Yang Guo looked through a crack in the wall and saw that as soon as that thin beggar went out the door, Peng Zhang Lao straightened up his body, drawing out a short knife and hiding it behind the door. He then heard the sounds of footsteps moving towards the west and disappearing out of the door. With a chuckle Yang Guo told Xiao Longnu, “This pair of beggars are about to kill each other, saving us a lot of trouble. That fat beggar is very dangerous. That thin one is definitely not his match.”

Xiao Longnu said, “It’ll be best if the two of them don’t come back. This house is quite peaceful. I don’t want people to come and disturb us.”

“True,” said Yang Guo. Suddenly he lowered his voice, “I hear the sounds of footsteps.” They then heard someone making a detour around the mountain side and come back behind the house.

With a faint smile Yang Guo said, “That thin old man’s come back for a sneak attack.” He pushed the window open and gently leapt out. Then he saw the thin beggar crouching down to peep through a crack in the wall. He didn’t see a trace of Peng Zhang Lao, as if that beggar hadn’t yet come up with a plan. Yang Guo walked up behind the thin man and said with a laugh, “Hey!”

Taken by surprise, the thin beggar snapped his head back, thinking that it was Peng Zhang Lao sneaking up behind him. His face looked alarmed and terrified. “Don’t be afraid. Don’t be afraid.” Yang Guo said and reached out to press the three pressure points -- on his chest, below his ribs, and on his leg. Then he moved the thin beggar to the front door. Before his eyes was a vast field of white deep snow. The child in him sprang up and so he called out, “Long’er, come quickly and

help me build a snowman.” He scooped up the white snow on the ground and started piling it onto that thin beggar’s body. Xiao Longnu came out of the house to help. Merrily, the two of them worked on the snowman and a short while later that beggar was thoroughly covered with the white snow. Except the pair of eyeballs that could still move, the thin beggar turned into an extremely fat and heavy snowman.

With a laugh Yang Guo said, “This thin decrepit old man’s become both fat and white in a flash.” Xiao Longnu giggled and said, “And that other fat and white old man... what would you change him into?” Yang Guo had yet to reply when he heard the sounds of footsteps from the distance. He lowered his voice, “That fat old beggar’s back. Let’s hide.” The two people returned to the house and shut the door. Xiao Longnu shook Guo Xiang, making her cry. At the same time she coaxed, “Hush, hush, don’t cry.” In her whole life, she’d never pretended to do anything but this situation was so strange that she didn’t even think about it. She saw that Yang Guo was having fun so she just played along with him.

As Peng Zhang Lao returned, he examined footprints on the snow. He saw the thin old beggar’s footprints going out and coming back again, showing that he was planning an ambush from the left side of the house. He followed the footprints to the back of the house and then came out to the front again. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were about to open the door but then saw his short body bending over to peep into the house through the window, his right hand firmly holding a knife, and his whole body alert.

The thin old beggar was freezing to the bone. He saw that Peng Zhang Lao [Elder Peng] was unsuspectingly standing right in front of him. If only he could move his hand, he would have been able to strike him dead. But the three pressure points on his body had been sealed, making him unable to move.

Peng Zhang Lao saw that there was nobody in the house and thought it was really strange. He pushed open the door, expecting the thin beggar to come out. But suddenly he heard the sounds of footsteps coming from the distance. Peng Zhang Lao's expression changed, and he went to hide behind the door panel, waiting for the thin beggar to return.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were puzzled. That thin beggar had become a snowman. How could there be people coming? While hesitating, they heard that it was two people and knew that they had guests again. Peng Zhang Lao's hearing was far inferior to theirs. As the two people were approaching, he looked alarmed.

Then someone from outside the house said, "Amitufo, we needy monks are stuck here in the mountain snow. May we ask the patrons to let us stay here overnight?" Peng Zhang Lao turned his body around and saw two old monks standing in the snow. One had long white eyebrows, with a benign face. The other was a small-built man with a gray beard, dressed in black. And even in this cold winter month, the two people were wearing thin clothes.

Peng Zhang Lao was still in a trance when Yang Guo came out of the room and said, "Please come in. Why are you two still standing in the doorway?" By this time Peng Zhang Lao saw the snowman. And after some observation, he eventually recognized the thin beggar. Seeing this strange transformation, he was greatly surprised and turned around to look at Yang Guo. But Yang Guo looked to be normal, as if he didn't know anything about it at all.

After having invited the two old monks in Yang Guo thought: "It looks like these two old monks aren't just ordinary people; especially that wicked looking monk dressed in black. With that strange glow in his eyes, I'm afraid he'll turn out to be like this Peng Zhang Lao." Then he said, "Big monks, you've

stopped to rest here. We are poor mountain people and can't provide beds for you to sleep in. Do the two of you eat game?"

The white-eye browed monk put his two palms together (he shi) joining ten fingers to pay respect) and said, "That's wrong. That's wrong. We've brought our own food. We dare not burden our patrons."

Yang Guo said, "That's good." Then he came back into the bedroom and whispered into Xiao Longnu's ear, "The two old monks looked to be very powerful masters."

Xiao Longnu frowned and said in a low voice, "There are really many evil people in the world. Deep in the mountain like this, people still won't leave us alone in peace."

Yang Guo bent down to look through a crack in the wall and saw that the white-eye browed monk took out four lumps of fried noodles from his rucksack. He gave two of them to the monk dressed in black and slowly ate the other two. Yang Guo thought, "The white-eye browed monk looks kind and composed, really like an esteemed monk. But there are just so many evil people who look good on the outside. Isn't this Peng Zhang Lao always laughing and looking very friendly? Still, how come that monk in black looks murderously evil like that?"

While contemplating this, he suddenly heard two 'lang-lang' sounds. That monk in black took out black shiny iron objects out of his robe. Peng Zhang Lao who was originally sitting on a bench immediately jumped up and drew out his knife. The monk in black paid him no attention. Instead, he chained his own feet with one of those black objects, which turned out to be an iron manacle, and did the same thing to both of his hands. Yang Guo and Peng Zhang Lao were stunned, unable to figure out why he shackled his own hands and feet. But

having seen this, they could somewhat let down their guard against him.

The face of that white-eye browed monk was filled with concern. He asked in a low voice, "It's acting up again?"

The monk in black replied, "On the way here I didn't feel very well. I'm afraid that it'll happen again." Suddenly he knelt down on the floor, putting his two palms together and pleading, "May Lord Buddha show mercy." Having said that, he crouched down and stayed motionless in a kneeling position. After a while, he started to shiver and gasp for air, making wheezing noises. Then he unexpectedly let out a bull-like roar, so loud that it shook the wooden walls and sent the snow on the rooftop down to the ground.

Peng Zhang Lao was so frightened that his heart was thumping wildly. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu also gaped at each other in astonishment, not knowing what this monk was doing. Judging from the roar, his body had to be in great distress. Although Yang Guo had been feeling hostility towards him from the beginning, this time he actually couldn't help pity the man. He mused, "I don't know what strange disease has struck him. Why hasn't that white-eyebrowed monk done something about it?"

After a while, the roar from that monk in black slowed, as if he was becoming out of breath. The white-eyebrowed monk soothingly said, "What should not be done will be done; what should be done will be rejected; repent from burning anger and hatred; from now on start anew..." These few sentences were spoken gently. But even amid the loud roar, one could still hear them very clearly.

Yang Guo was alarmed and thought, "This old monk's internal energy was so profound. Who in the world would be able to match him?" Then he heard the white-eyebrowed monk continue the Buddhist verse, "He who repents for his crime

will not be sad but become peaceful. He who repents for his misdeeds will not do evil.”

After the verse was recited, the monk in black stopped panting. He thought dully and croaked, “He who repents for his crime will not be sad... Shifu [master], I know full well I have done all sorts of things, all of them evil and full of hatred. I couldn’t control myself. I was thinking about ‘He who repents for his misdeeds will not do evil.’ But in my heart I couldn’t find peace. How could that be good?”

The white-eyebrowed monk replied, “Being able to repent for past sins is really difficult. We humans are not saints. Who has never erred? Only to know that we...”

As Yang Guo heard this, he vividly remembered something, “Guo Bobo [Uncle Guo] named me ‘Guo,’ meaning to change. He said it came from ‘knowing that we can change is the greatest virtue.’ Can it be that this old monk is a saint, coming today to change me?”

That monk in black said, “My evil is really difficult to expel. Ten years ago, even after I’d already followed master for a long time, I still injured three people. Today, it’s as if my blood is boiling, and it’s been very difficult to control myself. I’m afraid that I’m going to commit a hideous crime. I beg for master’s mercy. Please cut off both of my hands.”

The white-eyebrowed monk replied, “Good, very good! I could chop off your hands for you. But for all the evil thoughts in your heart, you’d have to eliminate them yourself. If your evil thoughts don’t go away, how would my cutting off all your hands and feet help?”

The monk in black shook violently and suddenly choked in tears. He said, “Shifu [master] has enlightened me. But all this time I haven’t been able to get rid of my evil thoughts.”

The white-eyebrowed monk let out a deep sigh and said, "Although you know what's right and wrong, your heart is filled with hatred. When you don't know how to love, evil thoughts are always difficult to eliminate. Let me tell you a Buddhist tale of a mother deer." The monk in black replied, "I'm listening." Then he sat down cross-legged. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu on the other side of the wall were also listening in silence.

The white-eyebrowed monk said, "A long time ago, there were a mother deer and two small fawns. The mother deer was careless and was captured by a hunter, who wanted to kill her. The mother deer kowtowed to him and begged, 'I just gave birth to two fawns. They are young and innocent, and do not know how to find water and grass. May I ask you for some time so I can teach them to find food for themselves? After that, I'll come back to die.' The hunter wouldn't listen. But after the mother deer begged and begged (with her sad doe eyes), he was moved and then let her go."

"The mother deer searched for her two babies. Then she lowered her head and cried, licking her children's bodies. In her heart was a mixture of happiness and sadness. She told the two fawns, 'A love relationship is predestined. Meetings have to end, and we rarely have much time. Today I'm your mother. I'm afraid I can't protect myself. Life and death are everywhere. And danger came too early.' The two fawns were small and didn't understand her meaning. And so the mother deer pointed them to a beautiful place with water and grass, tears flowing from her eyes. Then she said, 'Our time has ended. I fell into a hunter's hand by accident and was about to be killed. I begged the hunter so I could come back to see you, and today I'll die. I pity you, having to be motherless so young and living by yourself.'"

Having heard this, Xiao Longnu recalled how her own life would also be cut short. She thought about these few

sentences -- 'Life and death are everywhere, and danger came too early' and 'I pity you, having to be motherless so young and living by yourself.' She couldn't bear it, and tears were flowing from her eyes. Yang Guo knew perfectly well that the white-eyebrowed monk was only telling a Buddhist tale but the tale of the mother deer and her children was very sad, and so he also was moved.

The white-eyebrowed monk continued the story, "Having finished saying this, the mother deer left her two fawns. The two of them cried, weeping in sorrow and following her closely behind. The babies were small and couldn't run fast but they scrambled, tumbling down and getting up, to follow their mother, not willing to let her go. The mother deer paused. She turned around and said, 'Babies! You can't come along. If the hunter sees you, we mother and babies will all be finished. I'm ready to die, only fearing that you two are still weak. Nothing is permanent in the world. Everybody has to leave. I am ill-fated, causing you to lose your mother when you are still small.' And then she fled to the hunter. The two fawns didn't fear the hunter's arrows and arrived after her."

The hunter saw that the mother deer was trustworthy, giving up her life to keep her words, and that her determination surpassed that of humans. Besides, he saw that the three deer were not willing to leave one another. He felt pity and decided not to kill her. The three of them shouted out in happiness, thanking the hunter. The hunter then told this story to the king, and the whole nation applauded and stopped evil killings."

The monk in black listened to this story, tears streaming down his face. He said, "The deer were righteous. The mother deer was compassionate, and her offspring were filial. In no way can I compare to them."

The white-eyebrowed monk said, "If there is compassion, any killing intention will disappear." While saying this, he looked at Peng Zhang Lao who was nearby, as if he was also explaining all this to him. The monk in black responded, "True!" The white-eyebrowed monk continued, "If one wants to make amends that also is virtuous. It's better than repenting and doing nothing. From today on, we should do good deeds." Then he let out a small sigh, "Even I, in my life, have done many bad things." Having said this, he shut his eyes and was deep in thought.

Even though the monk in black understood his master's teaching, he was still troubled, finding it difficult to control himself. He lifted his head, only to see that Elder Peng was staring at him with a cat-like smile, his eyes looking as if they were shining lights. The monk in black was startled, feeling like he'd seen such a person somewhere before. He felt very uncomfortable with this meaningful look, and so he immediately turned his head away to avoid the gaze. But after a short while, he couldn't bear it and turned back to meet those eyes.

With a smile Elder Peng said, "The snow has been coming down hard, don't you think?"

The monk in black replied, "Yes, it's been coming down hard."

Elder Peng then said, "Come. Let's go look at the snow." Having said this, he pushed the door open. The monk in black repeated, "Good, let's go look at the snow." Then he got up to go stand side by side with Elder Peng at the door. At this time even though Yang Guo was behind the wall, he could sense that Elder Peng's eyes were really strange and ominous.

Elder Peng said, "What your master said is right. Murder is wrong in any case. But the power in your body is overflowing.

If you don't let it out, your heart feels very difficult. Is that right?" In a daze, the monk in black replied, "It's true!" Elder Peng said, "You might as well strike this snow man. Hit him, and you won't sin." The monk in black looked at the snowman and lifted both arms, eager to try. By now the two monks had been here for about half an hour, and the thin beggar's body was thoroughly covered with white snow, even his eyes couldn't be seen. Elder Peng urged, "Use your palms. Hit this snowman. Hit...Hit...Hit!" His words were soft, filled with encouragement. The monk in black channeled energy to his arms and said, "Good, I'll hit!"

The white-eyebrowed monk lifted his head and let out a long sigh. In a low voice he said, "Where there is a murderous intention, there is sin."

But then he heard a crashing sound. The monk in black shot out both of his palms, sending the white snow flying. The thin beggar's body was struck, his pressure points unsealed, and so he let out a loud miserable 'ah' cry, which echoed into the distance. Xiao Longnu softly cried out, her hands grabbing Yang Guo's.

The monk in black was shocked. He yelled, "There was someone in the snow!" The white-eyebrowed monk quickly came out and bent down to examine the body. The thin beggar was struck by the extremely powerful palms of the monk in black, and thus he was killed violently. The monk in black was all confused and became dully still.

Elder Peng acted like he was frightened and said, "This person was really strange. Why did he hide in the snow? Eh, why was he holding a knife?" Elder Peng had used his "Soul Absorbing Technique", urging the monk in black to kill the thin beggar. He was very pleased with himself. Still, he couldn't help being puzzled and thought to himself, "Surprisingly this servant had endurance, hiding very still in

the snow. Could it be that the snow was blocking his ears and so he didn't hear me urging that man to hit him?"

With a dull look in his eyes the monk in black could only cry out, "Master!" The white-eyebrowed monk said, "Such a pity. It wasn't you who killed this person, yet it was you who did it." The monk in black crouched down on the snow and his voice trembled, "I don't understand." The white-eyebrowed monk said, "You only knew that this was a snowman so you didn't mean to hurt people. But your palms were wickedly powerful, without restraint. How can it be said that you didn't have murderous intentions?" The monk in black said, "I certainly had murderous intentions."

The white-eyebrowed monk looked at Elder Peng with a long steady gaze. His eyes were gentle, yet filled with grief. Simply with just this look, Elder Peng's great 'Soul Absorbing' spell vanished. The monk in black suddenly cried out, "You are one of the Beggar Clan's elders. It now came to my mind!" The cat-like smile on Elder Peng's face disappeared in an instant. He frowned and shrewdly said, "And you are Iron Palms Chief Qiu. How did you become a monk?"

This monk in black was precisely Iron Palms Qiu Qianren. Years ago, on Mount Hua, he suddenly regretted all that he'd done and became a monk under Reverend Yideng's tutelage. And this white-eyebrowed, old monk was Reverend Yideng, who was in the same league as Wang Chongyang, Huang Yaoshi, Ouyang Feng, and Hong Qigong. Qiu Qianren shaved his head and became a monk named Ci'en, following a Buddhist's path and diligently mending his ways. But he'd done many despicable things in the past, making it very difficult to eliminate the monster in his heart. Facing the many temptations in the world, he couldn't resist hurting people. And so he'd made a pair of strong manacles so that whenever his mind became troubled, he could shackle his hands and feet, keeping his evilness in check. At this time

Reverend Yideng, who usually secluded himself in Hunan, had received a letter asking for help from his disciple Zhu Ziliu. So he and Ci'en were now on their way to the Passionless Valley. Nobody could have expected that they would run into Elder Peng on this remote mountain. Ci'en actually had no intention to hurt people.

In over ten years since becoming a monk, although Ci'en had violated some rules, this was actually the first time he had taken someone's life. His mind was greatly disturbed, feeling that over ten years of his Buddhist study was all for nothing. He gave Elder Peng a vicious stare, with raging fire in his eyes.

Reverend Yideng knew that this was a critical moment. If one used force to stop him from getting into a fight, his evilness would multiply. Like a bursting flood, once released, there would be no redemption. Having thought this, he only looked at Ci'en with kindness, hoping that his evil thoughts would just melt away when he came to his senses. He kindly stood by him and gently chanted, "Amitufo, Amitufo!" He repeated this several times until Ci'en stopped staring at Elder Peng and came back to sit in the house, breathing heavily.

Elder Peng had known earlier that Qiu Qianren's martial skills were weighty but he didn't recognize Reverend Yideng. Seeing the snow-white eyebrows, he mistook Reverend Yideng for a weak monk on the verge of death and paid him no attention. He only thought to use his 'Soul Absorbing' skill to control Qiu Qianren and achieve his goal. Who would have thought that as soon as Reverend Yideng looked at him, he felt as if his heart was crushed by a thousand-catty weight, he was not able to use his magical skill. By this time he'd almost wet his pants. He wanted to flee but this Qiu Qianren was also nicknamed "Iron Palms Floating on Water." His lightness skills were strange; he didn't even leave footprints

on the snow. It looked like he wouldn't be able to escape so he only hoped that Qiu Qianren would listen to the words of the white-eyebrowed monk, who was persuading Qiu Qianren not to harm him. He shrank himself in the corner of the room, frightened. And as Ci'en's pants grew heavier, his heart also thumped wildly.

Yang Guo had listened to Yideng telling the three-deer story. Now he thought about how no living things could escape death. Even though that thin beggar was wicked and deserved to be damned, his sudden encounter with this disaster was actually quite shocking. And more than that, he saw that Ci'en's palm strength was strangely fierce. Who was this monk with such powerful martial skills?

Then he heard Ci'en panting for air and loudly crying out, "Master, I was born an evil person. Heaven wouldn't let me repent. Although I didn't mean to kill people, I finally couldn't avoid taking somebody's life. I'm not a monk anymore!"

Yideng said, "Sin, sin! Let me tell you another Buddhist tale." Ci'en rudely retorted, "Why should I still listen to your Buddhist tale? You've been deceiving me for more than ten years. I don't believe you anymore." With two 'ge-la' 'ge-la' sounds, the chains on his hands and feet snapped. Yideng gently said, "Ci'en, what's done is done. You don't have to get angry."

Ci'en stood up. Facing Yideng, he shook his head. Then he turned his body around and struck Elder Peng's chest with both palms. With a loud crashing sound, Elder Peng collided with a wall and flew out into open space. After having been struck by these 'Iron Palms', his muscles and bones shattered. Even if he had ten lives, he would still be dead.

Hearing this loud crash, Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu jumped in fright and, side by side, came out of the room. They saw

Ci'en raising his hands up high, with his eyes shining with murderous lights. He loudly shouted, "What are you looking at? Once started, I might as well go all the way. Today this old man will start killing." Having said this, he channeled energy to his arms and was about to use his 'Iron Palms' again.

Reverend Yideng walked to the door entrance, shielding Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu's bodies. He sat down cross-legged and recited Buddhist verses. Then he said, "You haven't gone too far on the wrong path. You can still return. Ci'en, do you really want to sink beyond redemption?"

Ci'en's face turned blue and then red. His mind was extremely chaotic, with good and evil battling it out. Today his mind had been troubled since they encountered the snow, and it was also stirred up by the "Soul Absorbing Skill". More than that, he'd killed two people, making it very difficult to control himself. One minute Reverend Yideng was his gracious master who had been helping him, and the next he actually became his biggest personal enemy.

For a moment he stood there stiffly. Then his evil thoughts became stronger and stronger. Suddenly he gave a loud shout and attacked Reverend Yideng with his palm. Reverend Yideng brought his hand up to his chest, his body slightly swaying, as he blocked that palm strike. Ci'en angrily said, "You surely won't be able to defeat me!" Then his left palm struck again. Reverend Yideng raised his hand, yet he didn't counterstrike. Ci'en shouted, "Aren't you clever? You don't hit back. Then you'll die in vain. Don't blame me!"

Even though his mind was disturbed, his words actually made sense. His 'Iron Palms' and Reverend Yideng's "One Yang Finger" both claimed victories in battles, and years ago they were ranked equal in the martial world. Yideng's Buddhist study was the basis of their master-disciple relationship. But speaking of martial skills, even if Yideng

used the “One Yang Finger” against the ‘Iron Palms’ skill it actually would be somewhat inferior. In a one-way attack, using his whole strength to counterstrike, he might only win by a small margin, but as time went by, Yideng would eventually be killed or severely injured. Bravely, Yideng was willing to sacrifice himself, and received Ci’en’s palm strikes without hitting back. He only hoped that Ci’en would realize his mistakes and repent. This act of not using force against force was actually a battle between good and evil.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu witnessed how each of Ci’en’s ‘Iron Palms’ was like an axe striking Reverend Yideng. Coming to the fourteenth strike, Yideng let out a ‘wa’ sound and coughed up blood. Startled, Ci’en said, “Aren't you going to fight back?” Yideng gently responded, “Why should I fight back? What good is it if I win? What good is it if you win? We must fight with ourselves, restrain ourselves!” Ci’en was confused, muttering, “Must fight with ourselves, and restrain ourselves!”

Reverend Yideng’s words were like thunder rumbling in Yang Guo’s mind. He thought to himself, “Must fight our own nature, and must restrain our foolish thoughts. It’s certainly much more difficult than defeating powerful enemies. The words of this esteemed monk are really the truth.” He saw that Ci’en’s palms pause slightly in midair but, with a shout, they eventually struck down again. Yideng’s body shook, and he threw up another pool of blood, staining his white beard and monk’s robe.

Having seen Yideng’s defense techniques and endurance, Yang Guo knew that his martial skills were in no way inferior to those of the monk in black. But this was a one-sided attack, and even a body of iron and stone could eventually be destroyed. Now, he already admired Yideng to no end, knowing full well that he wanted to sacrifice himself to change that evil person. Anyway, he couldn’t bear to see

Reverend Yideng perish like this. He thought about how he himself, if using only palm strength, wouldn't be able to block the 'Iron Palms' of that monk in black. He turned around to grab his black iron sword and wielded it, shielding Yideng's body. He waited for Ci'en to strike with his 'Iron Palms' again and then thrusts forward his sword. The wind stirred up by the black iron sword clashed with the palm wind. Their bodies trembled.

Ci'en let out a surprised sound. Never would he expect that there would be a young hunter with such marvelous martial skills living on a wild mountain. Reverend Yideng also looked at Yang Guo in great surprise.

Ci'en sharply shouted, "Who are you? What are you doing?"

Yang Guo said, "The great reverend has given you great advice, how come you don't realize that? Not listening to the precious words is bad enough, but you have to be hateful and harm him. How would you not be worse than an animal acting like this?"

Ci'en furiously shouted, "Are you from the Beggar Clan too? Do you want to accompany that evil elder of the clan?"

Yang Guo laughed and said, "Those two people were the scum of the Beggar Clan. Your getting rid of those evil people was actually a good deed. Why must you beat yourself over it?"

Ci'en was startled, mumbling to himself, "Getting rid of those evil people was actually a good deed... Getting rid of those evil people was actually a good deed..."

Yang Guo had been behind the wall listening to their master-disciple verbal exchange, and so he understood Ci'en's concerns, knowing that remorse caused him to hate and stirred up his evil thoughts. He continued, "Those people

were traitorous disciples of the Beggar Clan, like a wolf hiding in our homeland of China. Your killing two such people was really a great thing. If they hadn't been killed, I don't know how many of our fellow Buddhists might have had to die. Lord Buddha is merciful but, meeting with such demons, how could benevolence still be used to expel evil spirits?"

Yang Guo's knowledge of Buddhist doctrines was very shallow but to Ci'en's ears what he said actually made sense. He slowly put down his hands but then he changed his mind, vividly recalling that in the past he himself had allied with the Jin, helping them invade the great Song country. And so it was like Yang Guo was actually derogating him. He suddenly raised his palm to hack down at Yang Guo and said, "Little animal, what nonsense are you jabbering?"

This palm was fast and furious. Yang Guo was busy trying to persuade him with words and didn't expect Ci'en to suddenly launch an attack. By the time the wind from his palm arrived, it was too dangerous to counterstrike with his own force. And so he went along with that palm strength, his body leaping backward. There came two crashing sounds as he crashed into a wooden wall, and his body was thrown out of the house. Reverend Yideng was startled and thought to himself, "Would this young man have to die like this? It looked like his martial skills were good! Alas, how would I be able to save his life?" His mind was greatly troubled.

The fire in the room was suddenly blown out by a gust of wind rushing through that hole in the wall. Yang Guo came in with the wind, his sword pointing at Ci'en. He shouted, "Good, today you and I will fight." Ci'en shot out his left palm, aiming to strike Yang Guo's sword tip with his palm strength. But Yang Guo's swordplay was really a testimony of Dugu Qiubai's ingenuity. Even though their ages were far apart, he shouldn't have been able to match this old master. With his sword practice under the mountain streams, the

snake gallbladders that boosted his energy, and the Divine Eagle's help, Yang Guo's sword skills were very similar to those of the unparalleled Demonic Sword Master of the past era. As Ci'en's palm arrived, Yang Guo's sword tip was only nudged a few inches aside, and it was still pointing at Ci'en's left arm. Horrified, Ci'en dodged to the right to escape the sword and quickly sent out another palm strike. With the two people's marvelous skills, the palms and the sword were battling violently.

Yideng watched the fight in wonder. This youth was only twenty years old or so but surprisingly, could fight a draw with master Qiu's 'Iron Palms'. His own knowledge was vast, yet he couldn't recognize where Yang Guo's martial skills came from. Also, his heavy sword was marvelously strange. Then he turned his head back and saw Xiao Longnu with a baby in her arms, standing by the door. She appeared a beautiful woman, with an elegant look. Surprisingly she didn't seem to be frightened by the two people's wicked fight at all. He thought to himself, "This young lady isn't a common character either." But then he noticed a dark cloud between her eyebrows and couldn't help letting out an 'ayo' cry. Xiao Longnu faintly smiled and thought, "You've figured it out."

By now the fight between the two people, a sword and two palms became even fiercer. Yang Guo had the advantage of using a weapon but Ci'en had one more arm, and so they were about even. There came a loud crashing sound as a wooden plank was shaken loose. More cracking sounds were heard as a post also snapped. This wooden house was small and not very sturdy. Really, it was no place for the two great masters to fight a battle. Wherever the sword edge and the palm wind went, the wooden boards on the four walls would all fly in chaos. Finally they heard another loud cracking sound as another post snapped, causing the whole house to collapse. With Guo Xiang in her arms, Xiao Longnu dove out

through the window. Yideng guarded their back, using his gown sleeves to brush away the flying debris.

In the howling wind and blowing snow, the two people's wicked fight continued on. In over ten years, Ci'en had never got into a fight like this. He gave out a loud cry, his Iron Palms flitting and flying everywhere. Over a hundred moves passed, but his opponent's sword strength was even more powerful. With his declining years, he'd gradually lose the fight. Yang Guo thrust his sword straight out. Seeing Ci'en dodging the blow, he quickly swept his sword around, and the fierce wind sent the snow swirling. Blinded by the snow, Ci'en quickly lifted his hand to wipe it off. Suddenly the black iron sword made contact with his right shoulder, and he felt as if his body was crushed by a thousand-catty weight. Not being able to keep his balance, he tumbled down with Yang Guo's sword tip on his chest. Although the sword was blunt, its force was strangely fierce. With its tip pressing against his breast bone, he could only breathe out but couldn't breathe in enough air.

At this time the word 'die' flashed in the mind of Ci'en. Since the time he'd learned his marvelous martial skills, he'd roamed Jianghu, only knowing how to kill and injure others. Extremely rarely had he run into any setbacks. He'd been defeated by Zhou Botong, and he'd run away to the Western region. Later on he'd depended on clever tricks to get away from the Old Urchin. This time death was nearing as it never had before. He thought that death itself wasn't a big thing but he felt that if his life was cut short like this, he wouldn't be able to make amends for all sorts of evil things he'd done in the past. Reverend Yideng's thousands and thousands of words couldn't get through to him but Yang Guo's one sword made him realize that, "Killing brings misery. I only knew how to kill people. Being killed like this is actually miserable."

Having seen Yang Guo defeating Ci'en, Reverend Yideng thought to himself, "Such a young hero is really very rare." Then he stepped forward and touched the sword blade with his finger. Heat shot through Yang Guo's left arm, and his black iron sword was immediately brushed aside.

Ci'en stood up and then threw himself down on the ground. He cried out, "Master, I deserve to die a terrible death. I deserve to die a terrible death!" With a faint smile, Yideng patted him on the back and said, "Change is not easy. Why haven't you thanked this young hero for the lesson?"

Yang Guo had earlier suspected that this old monk was Reverend Yideng. Having seen this monk brushing aside his sword blade with one finger, he thought that this 'One Yang Finger' and Island Master Huang's 'Divine Flicking Finger' were equally exquisite, and there was no third person in the world who could match their finger strength. He immediately kowtowed and said, "Disciple Yang Guo pays respect to Reverend." He saw Ci'en kneeling down before him so he quickly said, "Senior, please don't do that. I'm younger than you. Just now I've offended you enough." Then he pointed at Xiao Longnu and said, "This is my wife, named Long. Quickly come kowtow to the Reverend." With Guo Xiang in her arms, Xiao Longnu stepped forward to greet him.

Ci'en said, "Master, just now I'd gone mad. Is your injury very severe?" Yideng chuckled and asked, "Do you feel better now?" Ci'en felt sorry to no end, not knowing what to say.

The four people sat down on a collapsed post. Yang Guo recounted how he met Wu Santong, Zhu Ziliu and Diancang Yuyin. He also talked about how he got poisoned in the Passionless Valley, and how the Indian monk and Zhu Ziliu went there to seek the antidote for him and then got trapped.

Yideng said, "That's why my disciple has gone to the Passionless Valley. But do you know how this monk Ci'en is

related to the mistress of the valley?”

He'd heard Elder Peng calling Ci'en "Iron Palms Chief Qiu" so he said, "Reverend Ci'en was born with the last name Qiu. Could it be possible that he was the Iron Palms Chief Qiu?"

Ci'en slowly nodded.

Yang Guo continued, "In that case, the mistress of the Passionless Valley must be your younger sister."

Ci'en responded, "Indeed. Was she well?"

Yang Guo didn't quite know how to answer the question. Qiu Qianchi's husband had destroyed all the tendons in her four limbs, leaving her a cripple. He really couldn't bring himself to say the word 'well.'

Ci'en saw Yang Guo hesitate so he said, "That sister of mine always did as she pleased. I wouldn't be too surprised if she ran into trouble."

Yang Guo then said, "Her limbs were disabled but her body was actually very healthy."

With a sigh Ci'en said, "Many years have passed. We've all grown old. Alas, she and her two brothers..." Having said this, he was lost in thought, recalling old memories.

Yideng knew that Ci'en had yet to let go and that his close brush with death only interrupted the stream of evil thoughts. But really the roots of evil were still there. If stirred up by strong emotions, Ci'en would unavoidably go crazy again. He didn't know how much longer he could live and help Ci'en. He could only let it all depend on fate.

Seeing Yideng look at Ci'en with pity in his eyes, Yang Guo suddenly thought to himself, "Reverend Yideng's martial skills were definitely not inferior to his disciple's. Yet, he

wouldn't return the attacks. There must be a reason. I'm afraid my jumping out to fight like that would make the matter worse."

So he quickly said, "Reverend, I, young disciple, acted on the spur of the moment. Please let me know if just now I was rash, and made a mistake."

Yideng replied, "The human mind is hard to fathom. If he'd killed me, he couldn't have awakened like this. He would have sunk to the bottomless pit. You saved my life and brought him back to his senses. How could it be a mistake? I feel it was all for the better."

Then he turned to Xiao Longnu and asked, "How did you get poisoned, young lady?"

Having heard that, Yang Guo felt a ray of hope shining down on him. He quickly said, "We were circulating energy to heal her injury, and it was at that time that the poisons got into her body. Could you help her?" He then knelt down on the ground on both knees.

Yideng helped him up and asked, "How did she circulate her inner energy? Why is her energy flowing in the opposite direction?"

Yang Guo replied, "She used the reverse energy flow technique, along with the Chilled Jade Bed and my help."

Yideng heard his explanation and couldn't help clucking his tongue in approval. He said, "That Ouyang brother was really a strange person. This reverse energy flow technique is quite unconceivable."

He reached out to check Xiao Longnu's pulse. Then his face turned sorrowful. For a long while he didn't say a word.

Yang Guo looked at him nervously, hoping he would say "curable." Xiao Longnu's eyes were always on Yang Guo. She herself hadn't expected to live this long. Seeing a melancholy expression on his face, she slowly said, "Fate determines life and death. How could we have it all as we wish? Guo'er, grief can hurt you. Don't worry too much."

This was the first time Xiao Longnu spoke since Yideng's arrival. Her words were spoken gently and calmly, showing that she understood life and death. Yideng couldn't help becoming puzzled. He didn't know that since childhood Xiao Longnu had been taught to have a clear mind and little emotion. This lady was young and fatally poisoned. He'd thought that she'd be extremely saddened. Who would have thought that her speech was that of someone who had deep religious knowledge? He thought to himself, "This young husband and wife are really the world's perfect couple. The husband has such kungfu. The wife understands life and death. This is really rare. In my entire life, I've only seen one couple -- Guo Jing and Huang Rong-- that can compare to them. My own disciples don't even come close. Alas, her poisons are so severe. After my injury, I can't use my "One Yang Finger" to help her."

With a slight hesitation, he said, "You two are young but your achievements are really not common. May this old monk speak frankly..."

Having heard this, Yang Guo's heart sank, his hands turning ice-cold.

Then Yideng continued, "The young madam's poison condition is very severe. If I wasn't injured, I could use my "One Yang Finger" to temporarily stop the poisons so we could go search for the antidote. But today... luckily your energy foundation is strong. I have this medicine that can

save you for seven days. Then let us go to the Passionless Valley together to look for my disciple."

Yang Guo jumped up and cried out. "Good! This Indian monk is known for his knowledge of poisons. He must have a way to save my wife."

Yideng said, "If my disciple can find a cure that is natural. In the world some children die shortly after birth. Young lady here has had a chance to get married, that is fortunate."

Having said this far, he recalled that years ago Zhou Botong and Concubine Liu had a child but because of his own jealousy and hatred, he was not willing to save him. And that child eventually died. And it was actually Ci'en who'd injured him.

Yang Guo looked at Yideng with wide, shocked eyes. He thought to himself, "We still don't know if Long'er can be cured. Yet, you haven't said a word of comfort."

Xiao Longnu made a faint smile and said, "What Reverend said is true."

She looked out at the heavy snow and weakly said, "These snowflakes are so white and so beautiful. But after the sun comes out, each and every one of them will vanish, without a trace. Next winter there will be a lot of snowflakes again, but they will never be like this year's snow."

Yideng nodded and turned his head to look at Ci'en. He asked, "Do you understand?"

Ci'en nodded and thought -- when the sun came out, the snow would disappear, and it snowed in winter. What was so complicated about these simple facts?

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu had always been close. They understood even the vaguest thought in the other person's

mind. But now that she was conversing with Yideng, he was left aside. It was as if she and Yideng shared the same thoughts, and he himself was an outsider. This had never happened since he fell in love with her, and he was now perplexed.

Yideng took out an egg from his chest and gave it to Xiao Longnu. He said, "Do you know which came first, the chicken or the egg?"

This was an age-old conundrum which nobody could ever solve. Yang Guo thought to himself, "At a time of life and death like this, why are you asking such a question?"

Xiao Longnu accepted the egg. It was actually a porcelain egg but its color looked as if it wasn't. She paused a little and then clearly understood. She answered, "The egg hatches a chicken. The chicken lays an egg. Where there is life, there must be death."

She gently crushed the egg shell, and a pill tumbled out. It was a golden and perfectly round ball like an egg yolk. Yideng said, "Eat it, quickly."

Knowing that this medicine was precious, Xiao Longnu put it in her mouth, chewed, and swallowed.

Early next morning, it was still snowing. Yang Guo thought that the Passionless Valley was quite a distance away. Although Reverend Yideng's pill gave them seven extra days, they had to go as fast as they possibly could, with not even a bit of delay. He asked Yideng, "Reverend, how's your injury?"

Yideng's injury was really heavy but he wanted to save his apprentice brother, Zhu Ziliu and Xiao Longnu and knew that all were urgent matters. His gown sleeves flared out as he said, "It's not a problem."

He drew in air and sprang forward, covering over ten feet in one leap. The three people followed.

After taking the pill, Xiao Longnu felt a surge of warmth in her abdomen and her strength returning. With her lightness skills, she caught up with Reverend Yideng in no time. Ci'en was startled. This timid young lady actually had quite an awesome kungfu. Suddenly his competitive spirit rose. His feet became swift as he gave chase. One person was a Gu Mu disciple of with unparalleled lightness skills. The other was a renowned master nicknamed 'Iron Palms Floating on Water.' In a flash the two people had covered twenty, thirty feet, quickly becoming two gray spots on the snow. Yang Guo was afraid that Ci'en would suddenly become evil and hurt Xiao Longnu so he went after them to protect her. His lightness skills were inferior to those of the two people but his inner energy was solid, and his feet were strong. At the beginning, he was a great distance away from them. Less than half an hour later, the two people's shadows became clearer.

Suddenly he heard Reverend Yideng laughing from behind him. Yideng said, "Young gentleman's inner energy is so profound. This really is rare. May I ask who your master is?"

Yang Guo slowed down to move side by side with him. He replied, "My wife taught me my martial skills."

Yideng asked in wonder, "Is she as good as you?"

Yang Guo said, "For these past few months, my inner energy has somehow kept increasing. I myself don't understand why."

Yideng asked, "Is it possible that you've taken some kind of medicine that boosts inner energy? Perhaps shaped ginsengs or millennium mushrooms?"

Yang Guo shook his head and said, "I had dozens of snake gallbladders. Since then, my strength has skyrocketed. Do you think they are related?"

Yideng said, "Snake gallbladders? Snake gallbladders can cure rheumatism. They have nothing to do with inner strength."

Yang Guo said, "These gallbladders were from very strange poisonous snakes. Their scales glittered like gold, and their heads were crested. The shape was really weird."

Yideng paused for a bit and suddenly said, "Ah, they are the 'pu-si-qu' snakes, mentioned in a Buddhist record. They said these snakes lived underground, moved like a wind, and were extremely difficult to catch."

Yang Guo said, "A big eagle caught them for me."

"That really is the strangest thing in the world." Yideng exclaimed.

While the two people talked, their feet didn't slow down at all. After a while, they were nearing Xiao Longnu and Ci'en. Yideng and Yang Guo exchanged a smile. Even though their lightness skills were inferior to those of Xiao Longnu and Ci'en, speed declined with increasing distance, and it was then up to their inner energy. By this time, because her inner energy was inferior, Xiao Longnu had already dropped some ten feet behind Ci'en. And as soon as they rounded the mountain, Yang Guo pointed ahead and said, "Eh, how come there are three people?"

It looked like someone was closely trailing Xiao Longnu. Yang Guo took a look and sensed that this person's lightness skills were not less than those of Xiao Longnu and Ci'en. On his back he was carrying something that looked like a trunk yet his feet were still swift, and he was always twenty or thirty

feet behind Xiao Longnu. Yideng was also puzzled. Surprisingly there was another skilled master on this wild mountain. Last night he ran into this pair of young and elegant couple. Today he saw this person, obviously an old man.

Not long after being overtaken by Ci'en, the distance between Ci'en and Xiao Longnu widened. She heard the sounds of footsteps from behind and thought it was Yang Guo. She said, "Guo'er, that monk's lightness skills are incredible. I can't beat him. You go try."

The person laughed and said, "Come sit on this trunk and gather your strength. You don't have to fear that old monk."

Hearing the words, Xiao Longnu was puzzled. She turned her head back and saw a man with a white beard and hair. It was the Old Urchin Zhou Botong.

With a laugh, he pointed at the trunk he'd been carrying on his back and said, "Come ... come ... come!"

In this trunk was the stuff that had been in the Sacred Scripture Chamber of the Chongyang Palace and looked like it was filled with the Quanzhen sect's Taoist scrolls. Zhou Botong had brought it with him on his back. Xiao Longnu faintly smiled but said nothing. Zhou Botong suddenly dashed forward. He grabbed her with one arm and put her on the trunk. His body movements were so fast and his hand technique was so strange that Xiao Longnu couldn't even resist. While carrying the wooden trunk, he couldn't help thinking, "The Quanzhen sect is known throughout the world as an orthodox martial school. The Taoists at the Chongyang Palace couldn't defeat me. It must be because they hadn't learned the essence of their sect's martial skills."

By now Yang Guo and Yideng had recognized Zhou Botong. Ci'en was concentrating on rushing forwards for fear that

Xiao Longnu would catch up with him, and so he was the only person who didn't know that there was another person behind him.

Zhou Botong followed him in big strides and said, "Another half an hour, he'll slow down."

With a smile Xiao Longnu asked, "How do you know?"

Zhou Botong said, "I've fought with him, pursuing him from Zhongyuan [China] to the Western region and from the Western region back to Zhongyuan. After running around for tens of thousands of li, how could I not know?"

Sitting on the trunk, Xiao Longnu was both secure and comfortable, just like riding a horse. She softly asked, "Old Urchin, why are you helping me?"

Zhou Botong replied, "You are quite likeable, not like that crafty and strange Huang Rong. I stole your bee honey, and you are not mad."

They ran for another half an hour. And just like Zhou Botong had predicted, Ci'en started to slow down. Zhou Botong said, "You are off!"

He shrugged his shoulders, sending Xiao Longnu out over ten feet. Energy was sent to her feet, and she ran forwards. In just a moment she caught up with Ci'en and giggled. Startled, Ci'en sped up. But the two people's lightness skills were about the same level. One person had just had a long rest while the other had been running non-stop. The more they ran the further the distance between them. Ci'en had no way to catch up.

In his whole life, Ci'en had two of martial skills that no one in the world could compare but, in just one day and one night, his 'Iron Palms' was defeated by Yang Guo and his lightness skills were outmatched by Xiao Longnu's. He couldn't help

becoming depressed. Sensing that his legs were about to give out, he thought to himself in alarm, "I can't even defeat a young girl, can it be that my death is near?"

Last night he had his evil spell. After injuring his master, he had become restless. Just now he'd used all his strength in a lightness kungfu competition with Xiao Longnu and still lost. Even though his mind was troubled, he felt like all things in the world no longer made sense.

Observing them from behind, Yang Guo clearly understood. Seeing that Zhou Botong had secretly helped Xiao Longnu defeating Ci'en, his interest was piqued. He sped up to walk side by side with him and laughingly said, "Senior Zhou, many thanks."

Zhou Botong said, "Haven't seen this Qiu Qianren for a long time. The older he is, the crazier. How come he's shaved his head and become a monk?"

Yang Guo said, "He's now Reverend Yideng's disciple, don't you know?"

Having said this, he pointed to the back. Zhou Botong was horrified, crying out, "Emperor Duan is here too?"

He turned his head back and saw Yideng from a distance. He said, "I've got to run."

Then he immediately fled into the woods. Yang Guo didn't know who 'Emperor Duan' was. He only saw the trees and bushes moving. Zhou Botong had disappeared without a trace. Yang Guo thought to himself, "This person is so strange. There aren't many like him in the world."

As soon as Zhou Botong ran away, Yideng quickly stepped forward. Seeing that Ci'en looked withered and broken and all his earlier bravado had vanished, Yideng said, "With all your victories, how come you haven't figured this out?"

Disheartened, Ci'en didn't say a word.

Yideng continued, "You were blinded by your desires. With your strong martial skills, if not for your lust to win, how could you not know there was another person behind?"

The four of them traveled with haste, and the next five days flew by quickly. On the morning of the sixth day, Yideng's injury worsened, and he could barely support himself. Yang Guo said, "Reverend, please take a rest for a moment. Let your body recover. The Passionless Valley isn't very far from here. We, husband and wife, will hurry into the Valley with Reverend Ci'en and we'll rescue the Divine Monk and Uncle Zhu too."

Yideng faintly smiled and said, "I can't put my mind at ease."

He paused and then continued, "It's dangerous in the valley. I'd better come along."

Ci'en said, "I'll carry you." Having said that he put Yideng on his back and marched forward in big strides.

They arrived at the valley entrance in the afternoon. Yang Guo turned to Ci'en and said, "Should we let them know we are here so your sister can come out to greet you?"

Ci'en was nervous and had yet to reply. Suddenly he heard the faint sounds of clashing weapons. Ci'en thought about his sister and was afraid that she would be fighting with Wu Santong and the others. No matter who was injured, it would be quite bad. He said, "We must rush to stop them."

With his lightness kungfu he sped up. He was not fully familiar with the roads to the valley, and Yang Guo pointed in one direction.

The four of them rushed forward only to see seven or eight people in green holding their weapons, defending

themselves just outside the woods. They heard the sounds of clashing weapons but couldn't see who the people in green were actually fighting with.

Seeing that there were more enemies coming, the valley disciples in green gave out a shout and charged forward. But as soon as they got closer and recognized Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu, they halted. The leading disciple walked over and raised his sword to greet them. He said, "Have you already accomplished our chief mother's task?"

But Yang Guo asked, "Who are the people fighting in the woods?"

That disciple in green did not reply. Instead, he narrowed his eyes, not knowing whether Yang Guo had come with a good or bad intention.

With a faint smile Yang Guo said, "I (little brother) didn't come here to cause harm. Is Madame Gongsun well? Is Miss Gongsun all right?"

That disciple's hostility was somewhat resolved. He said, "Bless you. Chief mother and Miss Gongsun are well." Then he asked, "Who are these two monks?" Did they come with the four women?"

Yang Guo said, "What four women?"

That disciple replied, "They were actually two groups of two, barging in here. Chief mother ordered us to stop them but they wouldn't listen. Both groups went into the Passion Flower field. But as soon as the two groups saw each other, they started fighting."

Hearing him mention 'Passion Flower field,' Yang Guo was startled, not knowing which four women he was talking about. If they were Huang Rong, Guo Fu, Wanyan Ping, and Yelu Yan, how could they be fighting? So he said, "May I ask

you to lead me there? If I (little brother) know them, I may be able to break up the fight before going with them to greet the Chief.”

That disciple thought that the four women had already been detained anyway and that if he let Yang Guo see them, it would only show him the power of the Passionless Valley. So he led the four people into the woods, where they saw the two groups of women fighting.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were secretly alarmed. The four women were standing on a narrow strip of lawn about twenty feet long, encircled with row upon row of Passion Flowers. No matter from which direction they tried to come out, there would be seventy or eighty feet of Passion Flowers blocking them. And no matter how powerful their kungfu was, they still wouldn't be able to escape. Even a halfway jump would still be very difficult.

Xiao Longnu cried out, “It's my martial sister!”

To the south they saw two women, Li Mochou and her disciple Hong Lingbo. The two of them were using long swords because Li Mochou's fly whisk had been broken at Gu Mu.

They were fighting with another two women. One was holding the Willow Leaf saber, the other wielding a flute. The two girl's movements were swift and elegant, showing that their martial skills were not weak. Still, they couldn't match Li Mochou.

Yang Guo was alarmed and thought, “Aren't those the Cheng-Lu cousins?”

Now, Hong Lingbo slanted her body to attack. The young lady in yellow turned her head halfway backwards, and the one in purple dress also turned her body sideways. These girls were Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang.

The four people's fighting on a lawn this size was like holding a martial arts contest in a very small arena. The terrain was limited, not allowing for trivial mistakes. As if they were tied hand and feet, the four people couldn't unleash the power of their kungfu. It was fortunate that Li Mochou wasn't used to her new sword and that, with her former ties with Lu Wushuang, Hong Lingbo didn't really have a murderous intention. And so, even though the Cheng-Lu cousins were much inferior, they could still hold their own against their opponents.

Yang Guo asked the disciple in green, "How did the four people get in there to fight in the first place?"

The disciple in green was very pleased with himself and proudly replied, "This was Chief Gongsun's creation. We led them into this Passion Flower field and then piled up the flowers, blocking the entrance. How would they come out?"

Yang Guo quickly asked, "Have they been poisoned?"

"Looks like they haven't but it won't take long," replied that man in green.

Yang Guo thought to himself, "With your martial skills alone, how could you force Li Mochou into the Passion Flower field? Oh, you must have used your sect's evil fishnet. If the Cheng-Lu girls get poisoned, there won't be any antidote in the world to cure them."

And so, he immediately raised his voice, "Sister Cheng, Sister Lu, I'm right here. The flowers around you are deadly poisonous. You must be careful absolutely."

Li Mochou had noticed earlier that the Passion Flowers looked strange. On top of that, those disciples in green had used the flowers to block their way out, so she knew there had to be a reason. After entering the Passion Flower field, she warned

Hong Lingbo to be very careful and keep away from the Passion Flowers. Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang were both skilled and clever, how could they not see the danger? The four people had originally thought there were some kinds of traps or poisoned arrows hidden in the flower shrubs. Now that they heard Yang Guo's words, they dreaded the flowers around them even more. They all inched closer towards the center of the lawn, their bodies colliding. The fight became even more vicious.

Hearing Yang Guo calling them, Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang were delighted. They wanted to rush out to see him but the enemies were vicious, not allowing them to withdraw. Li Mochou actually wanted to kill the two girls so she could use their bodies as stepping stones to escape from the Passion Flower field. When she saw Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu, she was frightened. Luckily, they were separated by the Passion Flowers and so Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu couldn't come in to help the two girls. She fiercely shouted, "Lingbo, if you still don't fight with all your strength, you yourself will die in here."

"Yes, Master!" Hong Lingbo quickly replied, adding more strength to her sword and driving it towards Cheng Ying.

Cheng Ying raised her flute to block the strike but Li Mochou's long sword flew towards her throat. Lu Wushuang lunged forwards, raising her saber. Li Mochou sneered, blocking the saber with her long sword. Her left leg then flew up, kicking Lu Wushuang's wrist and sending her Willow Leaf saber into a Passion Flower shrub. Suddenly lights flashed. Li Mochou swung her sword three times at Cheng Ying. Unable to withstand the force, Cheng Ying had to move backwards. At this point, if she fell back one more step, her left foot would land on a flower shrub.

Lu Wushuang cried out in alarm, "Sister (cousin), you can't move back any further."

With a cold laugh Li Mochou said, "You can't move back any further. Then let's move forward." Having said that, she allowed Cheng Ying one step forward. Cheng Ying knew full well that Li Mochou didn't mean well but she herself was dangerously cornered. She had no choice but to move forwards.

Li Mochou sneered and said, "Really very brave!" Her long sword vibrated. Silver lights flashed, and her sword tip reached the upper part of Cheng Ying's body.

Yang Guo was observing them from outside and understood that Li Mochou was using one of Gu Mu's vicious sword techniques called "Cold Moon Attack". If one didn't understand the intricacies of the stances, he was likely to deplete his energy guarding the upper body and leaving his abdomen vulnerable. Seeing that Cheng Ying was busy protecting her chest, he quickly picked up a pebble from the ground, placing it between his thumb and middle finger. Then, with a whishing sound, the pebble was shot out fiercely, straight towards Li Mochou's eyes. Li Mochou's sword had already moved downwards and was only a few inches away from Cheng Ying's abdomen. Suddenly seeing a pebble flying her way, she had to let the enemy off and swung her sword back to hit the pebble.

What Yang Guo just displayed was Huang Yaoshi's "Divine Flicking Finger" skill. But his cultivated energy hadn't reached its peak so he could only use this technique to divert the enemy, forcing her to be on the defensive. If it were Huang Yaoshi himself flicking the pebble, he would have knocked Li Mochou's sword loose, and it would have been almost impossible to miss the target at this range. It was fortunate that he taught Yang Guo this technique because it

came back to save the life of his own disciple. But even so, Yang Guo and Cheng Ying were already drenched in a cold sweat.

Cheng Ying had just narrowly escaped death, color draining from her white and tender cheeks. Li Mochou knew that she was still in shock, and so she shouted, "Here I come again!" The long sword vibrated as she used the "Cold Moon Attack" technique once again. Cheng Ying was clever, knowing that the upper body attack was a fake and the middle body strike was real, and so she immediately protected her abdomen. Who would have thought that Li Mochou would slyly change her stance? While her sword tip pointed at Cheng Ying's abdomen, she dashed forwards, stretching out her left hand to seal the 'Jade Hall' point on Cheng Ying's chest. Then her left leg swept out to kick Lu Wushuang and at the same time the tip of her foot struck the 'Sun' point on the side of Cheng Ying's knee. These few stances were incredibly fast, sending both Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang to the ground. Yang Guo definitely couldn't help them both.

Li Mochou then grabbed Cheng Ying's back and threw her out with force. She did the same to Lu Wushuang and shouted, "Lingbo, step on their bodies..."

Before she could finish saying that, Yang Guo jumped in to grab Cheng Ying and moved forwards. Even though the accupoints on her chest and leg had been sealed, she could use her free arms to grasp Lu Wushuang.

She cried out, "Brother Yang, you..."

She had always had deep feelings for Yang Guo. And now she saw him jumping into the Passion Flower field, giving up his life to save hers, she was all overwhelmed.

Having grabbed the two girls, Yang Guo leapt back out and gently put them on the ground. With her stiff legs, Cheng

Ying couldn't stand by herself. Xiao Longnu unsealed her pressure points. Then the three girls all looked at Yang Guo. His pants were ripped by the poisonous thorns, blood dripping from his thighs and calf's. Nobody knew how much poison had entered his body.

While Cheng Ying wept, Lu Wushuang said, "You... you... didn't have to save me. Who told you to do this?"

With a bright smile Yang Guo said, "I've already got the passion flower poison in my body, a little more makes no difference."

But everybody knew that the amount of poison in his body really made a big difference. He only said this to comfort the three girls in front of him.

Cheng Ying looked at Yang Guo's empty right sleeve with tears in her eyes. Lu Wushuang said, "Sha Dan (Dumb Egg), your... your right arm? How did you lose it?"

Seeing that the two girls were extremely worried about Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu immediately thought of them as very good friends. With a smile she said, "He's not dumb, why do you call him dumb egg?"

Lu Wushuang let out an 'ah' sound and apologetically said, "I used to call him that. It's hard to change."

She looked at Cheng Ying and asked, "And this sister is?"

Yang Guo replied, "This is..."

Cheng Ying quickly said, "This sister's name must be Xiao Longnu."

"Right. I should have known, seeing how angelic she is." Lu Wushuang said.

With the knowledge that Yang Guo only had Xiao Longnu on his mind, the two Cheng-Lu girls had been jealous. Now that they actually met Xiao Longnu, they couldn't help feeling inferior. Both thought to themselves, "How can I ever compare to her?"

Lu Wushuang asked, "Brother Yang, what's happened to your arm? Has the wound healed?"

"It's already healed. Someone cut it off," replied Yang Guo.

Lu Wushuang asked angrily, "Which evil villain did it? That person must have used a low and despicable trick. Was it that wretched witch?"

Suddenly a cold voice from behind said, "You defame people behind their back. Isn't that lower and more despicable?"

Lu Wushuang was startled. She turned head back and saw a beautiful young girl. It was Guo Fu with a sword in her hand, looking enraged. Standing by her were several men and women.

Lu Wushuang was puzzled. She said, "I didn't scold you. I was scolding the evil person who cut off Brother Yang's arm."

With a 'shua' sound, Guo Fu pulled her sword halfway from its sheath. She said, "His arm was cut off by me. I've already apologized, and my parents have already punished me. Now you people are scolding me behind my back..." Having said this, her eyes turned red. She felt she was wronged by these people.

Days ago Wu Santong, Guo Fu, Yelu Qi, and the Wu brothers hid from the mountain fires in the creek. They waited for the fires to die down and then got out of the water to meet with Huang Rong, Wanyan Ping and Yelu Yan. They then all came to the Passionless Valley. The group arrived here long before Yang Guo and the others but they were searching the areas

around the valley, trying to find the Indian monk and Zhu Ziliu, without any success. That's why they were delayed. As for Li Mochou, her disciple, and the Cheng-Lu cousins, they were led into the valley by Zhou Botong.

Huang Rong, Wu Santong and the others quickly went to greet Reverend Yideng, and they all exchanged greetings. Although Cheng Ying had never met Huang Rong before, she knew this martial sister by reputation and greatly admired her. She immediately went over and kowtowed with utmost respect. She called out, "Martial sister!"

Knowing from Yang Guo that years ago her father had accepted another female disciple, now she found out that it was this extremely beautiful girl. As Huang Rong asked about her father and learned that he was strong and healthy, she was delighted.

The disciples in green had been watching them from the edge of the woods. Now seeing that the enemies from outside all gathered, making a noisy commotion, they didn't dare to block them. Instead, they ran back to report the matter to Qiu Qianchi.

Guo Fu and Lu Wushuang glared at each other angrily, with mutual hatred. As Guo Fu heard her mother order her to greet Cheng Ying, she was not pleased at all. She had to force herself to say 'Martial Uncle'."

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were standing in each other's arms on the other side. Yang Guo looked at Guo Xiang in Xiao Longnu's arms and said, "Long'er, let's give the little girl back to her mother."

Xiao Longnu lifted up Guo Xiang and kissed her on the cheek. Then she walked over to hand the little girl back to Huang Rong. She said, "Madame Guo, your child."

Huang Rong thanked her and took the little girl. From the time the girl was born until now, this was the first time Huang Rong had her child firmly in her hands. There were no words that could describe her happiness and joy.

Yang Guo turned to Guo Fu and clearly said, "Miss Guo, your little sister is well. I didn't use her to trade for the antidote to save my life."

Guo Fu retorted angrily, "My mother is here. Of course, you don't dare to. But if you didn't have such intention, what did you bring my sister here for?"

In this situation, Yang Guo in the former days would have quarreled with her. But his encounters with life and death during these past few months had changed him. Paying no attention to her, he only let out a dry laugh and walked away with Xiao Longnu.

Lu Wushuang looked at Guo Xiang and said to Cheng Ying, "Is this your martial sister's little girl? I hope she won't grow up to be evil and vicious."

It was impossible for Guo Fu to not understand that the words were meant to attack her, and so she retorted, "What business of yours is it if my sister becomes evil and vicious? What are you trying to say?"

Lu Wushuang said, "I didn't speak to you. Everybody has the right to deal with evil and vicious people. How could it not be my business?" Lu Wushuang only had Yang Guo on her mind. Having seen that Yang Guo's arm was chopped off, she and Cheng Ying were very angry. But she couldn't control her temper like her cousin did. Even though it was in front of many people, she still had to let it show.

Guo Fu was furious. Grabbing her sword, she shouted, "You cripple..."

Huang Rong yelled, “Fu’er, don’t be rude!”

At this time, they all heard a loud ‘ah’ cry from the distance. They turned their heads back towards the Passion Flower field and saw Li Mochou hoisting Hong Lingbo’s body high up in the air. The sound they heard just now was Hong Lingbo’s cry. While people had been busy arguing, they forgot all about Li Mochou and her disciple who were stuck in the sea of flowers. Startled, Lu Wushuang cried out, “Rats. Master is using her disciple as a stepping stone. Quick, we have to find a way to help...”

While the people outside were staring in confusion, Li Mochou suddenly threw Hong Lingbo out. As the body fell into the Passion Flower shrubs, Li Mochou sprang up, her left foot stepping on Hong Lingbo’s chest. She then jumped up again with both legs high in the air, and her right hand grabbing and hurling Hong Lingbo out one more time. Again, she descended on top of her disciple’s body.

She used this “Strength Borrowing” tactic twice, expecting to fall outside the flower shrubs on her third jump. Afraid that Huang Rong would be waiting to block her, she flew out again in the opposite direction, away from the group of people. But this time as her body shot up, Hong Lingbo suddenly gave out a loud cry and leapt up with her, grasping Li Mochou’s left leg. Losing her momentum, Li Mochou started to sink. Then her right leg shot out, kicking Hong Lingbo in the chest with a ‘peng’ sound. This kick was lethal, destroying Hong Lingbo’s internal organs and killing her instantly. Somehow, Hong Lingbo’s hands were still gripping Li Mochou’s leg, and the two of them plunged down together, falling into the flower shrubs just two feet short of the edge of the flower bed. When Li Mochou landed she received an unimaginable amount of poison which surged into her body.

Everybody was shocked speechless, staring wide-eyed at this sadly horrifying development. Lu Wushuang thought about how her martial sister used to take care of her. Grief-stricken, she wept loudly and cried out, "Martial sister, martial sister!"

Yang Guo remembered how years ago he'd played tricks on Hong Lingbo. He couldn't help feeling heavyhearted.

Li Mochou bent down to pry away Hong Lingbo's hands and saw that her open eyes were filled with hatred. She thought to herself, "I've been poisoned by the Passion Flowers. The antidote surely must be here in the valley." As she was about to walk around the piles of flowers and be on her way, she suddenly heard Huang Rong calling out, "Sister Li, please come over here. I have a few words to say to you." Li Mochou was surprised, and with a slight hesitation, she moved forwards twenty or thirty feet. "What?" She asked. She secretly hoped that Huang Rong would give her the antidote, or at least tell her how to find it.

"You didn't need to kill your disciple to leave the flower thicket," said Huang Rong.

Li Mochou reached for her sword and coldly said, "Are you trying to teach me?"

With a faint smile Huang Rong replied, "I wouldn't dare to. I'm only going to tell you one thing. You should have used your long sword to dig up the soil and wrapped it with your outer gown, making two very large balls. And if you had thrown them into the flower thicket, wouldn't they have made good stepping stones? Not only could you have gotten out safely, you wouldn't have had to hurt anyone."

Li Mochou's face color changed from white to red and then red to white. She was struck by enormous grief. What Huang Rong had just explained was really not difficult, but because she was anxious, she couldn't figure it out. Instead, she had

just killed the only person in the world that mattered and actually fallen to her own doom. She couldn't help saying bitterly, "No matter, it's already too late."

Huang Rong said, "Yes. It's way too late. Really, whether or not you are poisoned by the Passion Flowers makes no difference."

Li Mochou stared fixedly at her, not understanding the meaning of her words.

Huang Rong added, "You've already been poisoned by your own foolish, unrestrained passion. You hurt people, and so you hurt yourself. As of now..." Huang Rong sighed. "It is way too late."

Li Mochou turned arrogant. She said in a stern voice, "It was I who gave my disciple her life. Had it not been for me taking care of her since childhood, she wouldn't have lived until today. I gave her life. I then gave her death. It was only fair."

Huang Rong said, "Parents give life to their own children. Yet, they have no right to kill them. Who are you to think that you do?"

Wu Xiuwen held out his sword and shouted, "Li Mochou, today you'll pay for your innumerable crimes. There's no need for more talking. We'll fight."

Then the six of them – Wu Xiuwen, Wu Dunru, Wu Santong, Yelu Qi, Yelu Yan, and Guo Fu – arranged themselves in two lines and marched forward.

Armed with a saber and a flute, Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang moved a couple of steps forward. Lu Wushuang said, "You slaughtered my whole family, today your one life is way too cheap. Worse, you had to be so evil, killing Sister Hong. Your death won't even cover it."

Guo Fu turned to Lu Wushuang and said with a sneer, "You've got such a good master!"

Lu Wushuang returned the stare and said, "Even if someone with a big backer, does evil things, she should die just the same! You don't need to look to this demoness for an example!"

As Li Mochou heard Lu Wushuang mention "a backer," something came to her mind. She raised her voice and called out, "Little martial sister, have you completely forgotten our martial ties?"

She had roamed Jianghu all her life and never paid attention to anyone. This time she was asking Xiao Longnu for help. It could only mean that she had realized how grave her situation was. Besides, after killing Hong Lingbo, she felt a pang of guilt, her mind became disturbed.

Xiao Longnu didn't know how to reply but Yang Guo retorted, "You treacherously killed your own disciple; how could you mention any martial ties?"

"So be it!" Li Mochou said with a sigh. Swinging her long sword, she said, "You all come at once. The more people the better."

The Wu brothers pulled out their swords. On the left side Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang both lunged forwards. Wu Santong, Yelu Qi and the others also held their weapons at the ready. Having seen the way she despicably killed Hong Lingbo just now, everybody was extremely hate filled and disgusted. Even Reverend Yideng thought that if Li Mochou was allowed to live, she would only murder more people. But the 'ding dang' sounds of clashing weapons went on. Li Mochou's martial skills were high and she disrupted the many people's offense in a flash.

Suddenly Li Mochou's left hand flew out. She shouted, "Projectiles!"

Knowing that her "Soul Freezing Needles" were deadly, all of them all froze stiff, only to see her body spring up and fall into the Passion Flower thicket. They couldn't help crying out in alarm. Li Mochou did this because she already had the poison in her body and she thought that if she got pricked again, it wouldn't be much worse. Even Huang Rong and Yang Guo hadn't expected this. They all saw her return through the flower thicket and then went straight into the woods.

Wu Xiuwen said, "We pursue!"

Brandishing his long sword, he made a detour and followed Li Mochou into the woods from the east side. But the pathways in the woods were winding, with sharp turns. Only twenty or thirty feet in there, he ran into a three-way junction. While still hesitating, he suddenly saw five girls dressed in green coming out. The one in front was holding a flower in her hand, and the other four trailing behind wore long swords at their waists.

The girl in front asked, "The Valley Chief requests your presence. Would you please come with us?"

Yang Guo saw her from afar so he called out, "Miss Gongsun, it's us."

That girl was of course Gongsun Lu'E. Upon hearing Yang Guo's voice, she lost her composure and quickly stepped forwards. Happily she said, "Big Brother Yang, have you accomplished your big task? Let's quickly go see my mother."

"Miss Gongsun, let me introduce you to these several elders," said Yang Guo.

He first introduced her to Reverend Yideng, and then Ci'en and Huang Rong.

Gongsun Lu'E did not know that the monk in black in front of her was her own uncle, and so she walked over to pay him respect without much thought. But then she heard Yang Guo address Huang Rong as Madame Guo. She knew that this person was her mother's personal enemy. Not only had Yang Guo not killed her, he led her into the valley. Greatly suspicious, she moved a couple of steps backwards, refusing to greet her. She said, "My mother invites everybody for tea in the main hall."

She thought to herself that she'd better do as her mother had ordered, so she led the many people to the main hall.

In the hall, Qiu Qianchi was sitting in a chair. She said, "This old woman's limbs are disabled. I can't get up to welcome you. Please accept my apology."

Ci'en remembered his little sister. At the time she married Gongsun Zhi, she was a fledgling girl of eighteen, full of tenderness and grace. Nobody could have imagined that she would turn into an old, bald, wrinkled, ugly woman like this. He thought of the past and felt at a loss.

Yideng saw the strange gleam in his eyes and couldn't help being worried. In his life, the only worry he had left was this disciple who still couldn't wake up and turn a new leaf. This was because Ci'en's kungfu was profound. Years ago, he was an unmatched master in the martial realm, and so his deep attachment to the past made change even more difficult. Over the past ten years, he'd lived in seclusion on a remote mountain and had calmed down. But this time when he stepped back into Jianghu, he ran into things that reminded him of the past. There was a saying that "He, who never encounters desires, will have a peaceful heart." And so, when running into things that triggered a worldly desire, his mind

would become disturbed, how would Ci'en be able to control himself? Yideng had brought Ci'en with him to the Passionless Valley this time because he wanted to help his martial brother and Zhu Ziliu. But it was also very hard on Ci'en because his mind was greatly afflicted.

Because Yang Guo didn't return to the Passionless Valley in time, Qiu Qianchi had thought that he had already died from the poison. Suddenly seeing him still alive and well, standing before her, she was puzzled. She asked, "You are not dead yet?"

"I've taken an antidote. Your flower poison is now gone." Yang Guo said with a laugh.

Qiu Qianchi made a surprised sound. She thought to herself, "Surprisingly, there is an antidote that can detoxify the Passion Flower Poison. How strange..."

But suddenly she figured it out. With a sneer she said, "What kind of lie is this? If there really was an antidote, why would that Indian monk and that Zhu person have come here?"

Yang Guo said, "Senior Qiu, where did you imprison the Indian monk and Senior Zhu? I (junior) am already here. Please let them go!"

With a sneer Qiu Qianchi said, "To tie a tiger is easy; to let it go is hard!"

These words of hers actually made sense. All her four limbs were disabled, and so she could only rely on her sect's fishnets to capture the Indian monk and Zhu Ziliu. If released, the Indian monk would be all right because he didn't know kungfu but Zhu Ziliu would definitely retaliate. None of the disciples of the Passionless Valley was his match.

Yang Guo thought that if she saw her elder brother, their blood ties would make things friendlier. And so, he said with

a faint smile, "Senior Qiu, please look at us carefully. Who did I bring back here? I'm sure you'll be delighted."

For decades Qiu Qianchi hadn't seen her brother. Although she knew that he had become a monk, in her mind she only remembered him as a victorious and courageous youth. How would she be able to recognize this old monk? Hearing from her daughter that Huang Rong, her own personal enemy, had arrived, her eyes scanned the faces of many people and finally came to stop on Huang Rong.

Clenching her teeth, Qiu Qianchi said, "You are Huang Rong. My elder brother died at your hand."

Yang Guo was startled. His original intention was to have the brother and sister meet. Instead, she recognized her archenemy. He quickly said, "Senior Qiu, we'll put that on abeyance for now. Won't you take a look again to see who else is here?"

Qiu Qianchi shouted, "You mean Guo Jing is here too? How wonderful... how wonderful!"

Then she looked at Wu Santong and Yelu Qi. One was too old, the other too young, looking not quite right. Frustrated, she searched for Guo Jing among the many people. Then her eyes met with those of Ci'en. They exchanged a stare, finally recognizing each other.

Ci'en jumped forward and cried out, "Third sister!"

Qiu Qianchi also gave out a loud cry, "Second brother!"

The two of them had countless things to say to each other, yet at this time they couldn't think of anything to say.

A while passed, and then Qiu Qianchi asked, "Second brother, how did you become a monk?"

Ci'en asked back, "Third sister, how did your limbs become disabled?"

"It was that villain Gongsun Zhi who did it," replied Qiu Qianchi.

Ci'en said in alarm, "Gongsun Zhi? It was your husband? Where is he right now?"

Qiu Qianchi said bitterly, "Why do you still call him 'my husband'? The traitor has a wolf's heart and dog's lungs. He plotted against me."

Unable to suppress his anger, Ci'en cried out, "Where did the villain go? I'll tear him to shreds, and make it up to you."

Qiu Qianchi coldly said, "Although I was the subject of an evil plan, luckily I could escape death. Our big brother, on the other hand, was already murdered."

Ci'en said darkly, "Right!"

Qiu Qianchi gathered her chi and ferociously shouted, "Your body is skilled and able, and why are you not avenging our big brother's death? Where is your brotherly loyalty?"

Startled, Ci'en muttered, "Avenging our big brother's death? Avenging our big brother's death?"

Qiu Qianchi bellowed, "That evil Huang Rong is right in front of you. You kill her first and then go look for Guo Jing."

Ci'en gazed at Huang Rong, with a strange gleam in his eyes.

Yideng slowly stepped forwards and softly said, "Ci'en, how can a monk have murderous thoughts? The fact is that your brother brought about his own death, you can't blame other people."

Ci'en nodded and was lost in thought. After a while, he said in a low voice, "What my master said is right. Third sister, we can't avenge his death."

Qiu Qianchi gave Yideng a stare and snarled, "This old monk is spouting nonsense. Second brother, our Qiu family has been brave and heroic. Our big brother was killed. If you don't avenge his death, how can you still call yourself a heroic true man?"

Having heard that, Ci'en's mind became chaotic. He muttered, "How can I still call myself a heroic true man?"

Qiu Qianchi said, "Right! Years go you roamed Jianghu. The name "Iron Palms Floating on Water" was famous and prestigious. Who would have thought that, in old age, you'd turn into a coward who is afraid of death? Qiu Qianren, I'm telling you now. If you don't avenge our big brother's death, do not call me your sister!"

Seeing her become fiercer and fiercer, everyone thought, "This bald old woman is quite lethal."

Years ago, Huang Rong was struck by Qiu Qianren's palm. Luckily Reverend Yideng came to her rescue, and so she narrowly escaped death. Naturally she knew him well. As soon as she saw him, she'd already thought about pulling out her horse whip.

Again, Guo Fu couldn't bear it and shouted, "My mother doesn't want to stoop to your level. Who's afraid of you old woman? If you continue to egg people on, I'm going to have to be impolite."

Huang Rong was about to tell Guo Fu to stop but then she figured, "That Qiu Qianren must be urged by his sister to act. Fu'er's attack may actually help divert his attention."

Noticing that her mother didn't try to stop her, Guo Fu carried on, "We are your guests. Yet, you are not treating us accordingly. Actually, you are rude, how would you call yourself a hero?"

Qiu Qianchi gave her a cold stare and said, "You are Guo Jing and Huang Rong's daughter, aren't you?"

Guo Fu replied, "Correct, and if you want to fight, you have to do it yourself. Your brother has already become a monk. How could he ever kill anybody again?"

Qiu Qianchi muttered, "You are Guo Jing and Huang Rong's daughter. You are Guo Jing and Huang Rong's..."

She didn't say the word 'daughter' again. Instead, with a 'hu' sound, an iron date stone was suddenly spat out from her mouth, violently coming towards Guo Fu. Her words 'You are Guo Jing and Huang Rong's daughter' were followed by 'You are Guo Jing and Huang Rong's...' Everybody naturally thought she was going to say 'daughter.' None could have thought that in the blink of an eye she would shoot a projectile from her mouth. This sudden date stone kungfu of hers was really ingenious. It even blinded the right eye of Gongsun Zhi, who was a remarkable kungfu master. Guo Fu definitely didn't stand a chance. She didn't even have the time to think about dodging the projectile. [Note: Since the last visit to the Passionless Valley, Qiu Qianchi must have had iron date stones made by someone in the valley to increase her 'fire power'.]

Among all these people, only Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu knew that Qiu Qianchi had such strange kungfu. While Xiao Longnu didn't think she would harm people, Yang Guo had been paying close attention, his eyes never leaving her face. Seeing that her lips were not about to say the word 'daughter, he plunged forwards, pulling out the long sword from Guo Fu's waist and swung it. A dang sound echoed as

the iron date stone hit the blade. The sword immediately broke into two pieces before falling on the floor.

In one voice, many people cried out in alarm. Huang Rong and Guo Fu were startled, the color draining from their faces.

Huang Rong mused, "I was guarding against her vicious attack but never would I have expected that she could shoot out a ferocious projectile like this without even moving her body, limbs, or neck."

The iron date stone broke the sword, showing that it was shot out with great force. Everybody understood and thought, "If not for Yang Guo's interfering, would Miss Guo still be alive? And his movement was so swift that it was really shocking."

Qiu Qianchi stared at Yang Guo in disbelief. She hadn't expected him to have the nerve to help Guo Fu. She coldly said, "Today you were poisoned again by the Passion Flower. The poison doesn't manifest itself now but it will, in less than three days. In the whole world there is only my half-pill here that can save your life. Don't you believe that?"

At the time Yang Guo jumped in to save Guo Fu, everything happened so fast that he didn't even think of this matter. As Qiu Qianchi brought it up now, he couldn't help feeling discouraged.

Stepping forward, he gave her a bow and said, "Senior Qiu, I (junior) haven't done anything to you. If you give me the pill, I'll forever be grateful."

Qiu Qianchi replied, "Never! Although it's true that I have today because of you, this old Qiu has revenge to exact and gratitude can't be taken into account. You promised me you'd go bring me Guo Jing and Huang Rong's heads. Then I'd grant you the antidote. Who would think that not only did

you not keep your promise, you just saved my personal enemy. What else is there to say?"

Seeing that the matter was escalating, Gongsun Lu'E said, "Mother, my uncle's death has nothing to do with Big Brother Yang. You... please bestow mercy."

Qiu Qianchi said, "I'll only give this half pill to my son-in-law. I'm not going to give it to anybody else."

Having heard this, Gongsun Lu'E blushed furiously in shame and anxiety.

Yang Guo had saved Guo Fu's life. By this time, she realized that Yang Guo was truly benevolent and really didn't intend to trade her little sister for the antidote. She thought about how she had repeatedly hurt him but he always returned her viciousness with kindness. In a loud voice she said, "Big Brother Yang, I (little sister) have wronged you. Please forgive me."

But for some unknown reason, old grudges are hard to let go. As soon as she apologized, she thought, "You saved me because you wanted to show off your ability. You wanted me to submit to you and feel grateful to you. You wanted to show me that even though you had only one arm, you were still much stronger than me with two arms. Humph, isn't that just great?"

Yang Guo let out a faint sigh, which was actually quite bitter and with no humor. He thought to himself, "How very easy for you to admit that you were wrong. You don't even know how much suffering you brought on me and Long'er."

Then he saw that Qiu Qianchi was giving him a fixed stare. Obviously, if he didn't agree to marry her daughter, she would never give him that half pill to save his life. Again, he

refused to compromise and made things awkward for Gongsun Lu'E and Xiao Longnu.

He brightly said, "I'm already married to Long'er. Even I, Yang Guo, am doomed to die, how can I shirk my responsibilities?" Having said this, he turned around, taking Xiao Longnu by hand. While walking to the hall entrance, he thought to himself, "Let them squabble in the hall. I'd better go rescue the Indian monk and Uncle Zhu."

With a sneer Qiu Qianchi said, "Good, good! You yourself volunteered to die; this has nothing to do with me."

She turned her head back towards Ci'en and said, "Second brother, I've heard that Huang Rong is Chief of the Beggar Clan. We, "Iron Palm Clan", don't dare to offend her."

Ci'en said, "Iron Palm Clan? It's already been disbanded. How could there still be such a clan?"

Qiu Qianchi said, "No wonder, no wonder. You don't want to fight. You've become a coward..."

Qiu Qianchi was still talking but Gongsun Lu'E no longer listened to her. Watching Yang Guo step out of the hall, she suddenly dashed forwards. She cried out, "Yang Guo, you heartless scoundrel, I must have been blind."

Yang Guo paused in his steps, wondering why this girl, who had always been courteous, was acting out of character. Could it be because she heard that he and Long'er were married and became enraged? He felt a slight regret, and so he turned his back and said, "Miss Gongsun..."

Gongsun Lu'E scolded, "Crafty thief, it's easy to come into the valley but hard to get out..." But although she was berating him, her facial expression was actually warm and gentle, her eyes conveying a hidden message. Yang Guo knew that there had to be a reason.

In a loud voice he said, "What is it? You say this small Passionless Valley is hard to get out of?" He was facing the main hall. Qiu Qianchi saw him very clearly and therefore didn't see anything strange.

Lu'E scolded, "I wish I could split you in half. I would rip out your heart so I can see..." She suddenly opened her mouth and, with a puff of air, a date stone was spat out, flying towards Yang Guo's face.

Yang Guo caught it with his hand. He sneered, "Just let me leave quickly and I won't hurt you. You think your little skill could stop me?"

Gongsun Lu'E gave him another meaningful glance and let him leave. Suddenly she covered her face with both hands and cried out, "Mother, he... he's a big bully!" She fled back into the main hall. Her loved one was gone. He had married another girl. This sadness was actually not false.

Seeing tears stream down her face, Qiu Qianchi shouted, "E'er, what's wrong with you? That boy's life won't last very long." Lu'E crouched down at her mother's knee and her sobs continued.

Everybody in the hall was deceived by this performance. There was only Huang Rong who secretly thought it to be funny. She mused, "She pretended to be mad at Yang Guo so her mother wouldn't be suspicious and later she could steal the antidote. Who would have thought that this boy Yang Guo would leave a trail of broken hearts behind him everywhere he went. All these beautiful girls pine for him." Having thought this, she gave Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang a glance.

After catching that date stone, Yang Guo walked out very quickly. Lu'E's words were very strange, and he still couldn't figure out her intention. Xiao Longnu saw the expression on

Lu'E's face and knew that her tirade was pretended. She asked, "Guo'er, she pretended to be mad at you. Was it because she was trying to fool her mother so she could steal the antidote?"

Yang Guo replied "It would seem so."

As soon as the two people rounded a curve in the path and saw that they were alone, Yang Guo raised his hand and looked at the date stone in his palm. It was actually an olive seed, with tiny stitches in the middle. Yang Guo squeezed it with his fingers, breaking it in half. The middle of the seed was actually hollow, with a thin sheet of paper hidden in there.

With a smile Xiao Longnu said, "This girl told you a riddle. She actually meant this when she said ...split you in half. I would rip out your heart so I can see..."

Yang Guo unfolded the thin paper, and the two of them bent their heads to look at the words. The paper read, "Mother hid the half pill in a secret place. I will plan to steal it for you. The Indian monk and senior Zhu are confined in 'the fire room'. " (kiln) Next to the characters was a map showing a winding path that ended at 'the fire room.'

Yang Guo said in delight, "Let us go quickly. It's good that no one is here to stop us right now."

End of Chapter 30.

Shen Diao Xia Lu (Divine Eagle, Gallant Knights)

by Jin Yong



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Chapter 31 - The Other Half of the Antidote

Translated by Bee Dreamer, xuelian & xiao_long_nu



With a "po" sound, the third date stone left Qiu Qianchi mouth. This time, it went for Huang Rong's throat. Huang Rong had promised not to block and not to avoid. She slightly bent both of her knees, waiting for the date stones to fly to her lips. With all her effort, she pushed the 'Zhen Qi' out of her mouth.

Surrounded by the mountains, the floor of the Passionless Valley was vast, occupying about thirty thousand acres of land, with winding paths, towering hills, and deep ravines. But Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu used their lightness kungfu to follow the path on the map, and they arrived at their destination in just a short while. In front of them they saw several big elm trees, seventy or eighty-feet high, providing a shade for a brick and pottery kiln below. The map showed that the Indian monk and Zhu Ziliu were imprisoned here.

Yang Guo turned to Xiao Longnu and said, "You wait here. I'll go in and take a look. With charcoal and ash in there, it must be very dirty." As he bent over to step into the kiln, he was hit by a heat wave.

"Who is there?" A voice shouted.

Yang Guo said, "I've got the chief's order. I'm coming to get the prisoners."

That person emerged from behind the brick wall and asked, "What?" Seeing Yang Guo, he was startled and said, "You... You..."

Yang Guo saw that he was a valley disciple dressed in green so he said, "The chief has ordered me to come get the monk and the man surnamed Zhu."

That disciple knew that Yang Guo had saved his master's life, that she'd announced in front of everybody that Yang Guo

was her intended son-in-law, and that he and Lu'E were on the best terms. This person would one day become the Valley Chief, and so he didn't dare to offend Yang Guo.

He said, "But... what about the chief's command sign?"

Yang Guo ignored him and said, "Let me come in and take a look." That disciple complied and turned back into the kiln.

Inside the brick walls, the heat was even more intense. Two lowly laborers were raking charcoal. Although it was bitterly cold at this time of year, the two people were actually bare-chested, each wearing short pants to cover his lower body. Still they were sweating profusely. The disciple in green pushed aside a big stone, revealing an opening. Yang Guo went inside and saw that it was actually a stone chamber of ten feet square. Zhu Ziliu sat there with his face to the wall, using his index finger to draw pictures. His arm rose and fell as if he was very pleased with himself. The Indian monk was actually lying on the floor, and it was hard to tell if he was still alive. Yang Guo called out, "Uncle Zhu, how are you?"

Zhu Ziliu turned his head back. He laughed and said, "A friend has come to visit from afar; how could I not be fine?" Yang Guo had to admire him. He was stranded here for a long time but still kept calm as if everything was normal. Even in crisis, he could still be mirthful. He himself was far, far inferior to him in this regards.

"Is the Divine Monk sleeping?" He asked. Having said this, his heart was beating wildly because Xiao Longnu's life depended on this Divine Indian Monk.

Zhu Ziliu didn't reply. Only after a while he let out a gentle sigh and said, "My Martial Uncle can usually withstand heat and cold much better than I can, but this time..."

It sounded like the Indian monk's condition was critical. Frightened, Yang Guo didn't bother to say any more words. He turned his head to the disciple in green. He ordered, "Unlock the door. Let them out."

The disciple in green said in surprise, "What about the lock? The chief's got the key. If she ordered you to free people, how come she didn't give you the key?"

Impatient, Yang Guo shouted, "Make way!" He lifted his black iron sword and struck down, making a big hole in the stone wall with a 'ka' sound. That disciple let out an 'ah' cry and froze with fright. Yang Guo swung his sword a few more times and that five-inch window became wide enough for a person to pass through.

Zhu Ziliu cried out, "Brother Yang, I congratulate you on your great skills!"

He bent over to pick up the Indian monk, passing him through that hole. As Yang Guo took him, he could feel that the Indian monk's arm was warm. His heart jumped. But then he saw that the Indian monk's eyes were shut tight. He thought to himself, "Aiyo, even a dead body is warm in this fire room." He quickly stretched his hand to feel the Indian monk's breath and realized he was still breathing faintly.

Zhu Ziliu jumped out from that hole in the wall. He said, "Martial uncle has passed out. Hope it's not a great obstacle."

Yang Guo blushed. He thought to himself, "Shame on you!" He thought about how he himself didn't really care about the Indian monk's well being but more about how to save his own wife. He asked, "Did he pass out from heat exhaustion? Let's quickly go outside to get some air." Then he carried him out. Seeing the three people, Xiao Longnu was delighted.

Yang Guo said, "Let's find some cold water to sprinkle on Reverend's face."

"No, Martial uncle was poisoned by the Passion Flowers." Zhu Ziliu said.

Yang Guo was startled. He asked, "Is the poison severe?"

Zhu Ziliu replied, "I think not. It was he who poisoned himself."

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were puzzled. In one voice, they exclaimed, "What?"

With a sigh Zhu Ziliu said, "Uncle said that these Passion Flowers were already extinct in India. He didn't know how it had been spread. He said that if it got out of hand, it would be a great disaster. Years ago, people and livestock in India had been poisoned and died because of these flowers. Martial uncle had thoroughly researched poison techniques but this Passion Flower poison was really strange. He came to the valley this time, knowing that the Divine Pill (Passionless Pill) could only help one person. He wanted to find out what could detoxify the poison to help people on a large scale. He used his body to test the poison so he would understand its nature and be able to find the antidote."

Yang Guo was half amazed and half in awe. He said, "Buddha said – if I don't go to hell who will? Reverend is trying to save people, not hesitating to face a disaster. People really have to respect him."

Zhu Ziliu said, "In an ancient tale, Shen Nong tried a hundred kinds of herbs to save people. If it was the wrong herb, his face would turn blue. This Martial Uncle of mine must have had this story in mind."

Yang Guo nodded and said, "Right. Do you know when he will regain consciousness?"

"After he poisoned himself, he said if his calculation was not wrong, he would wake up after three days and three nights," said Zhu Ziliu.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu looked at each other. They both thought, "He'll be in a coma for three days and three nights. It means the poison is very severe. Fortunately this Passion Flower poison affects people differently. If one has a passionate heart, the poison will act up very fiercely. This monk has a steady heart. He's much better than an average person."

Xiao Longnu said, "You two were in the kiln, how did you find Passion Flowers?"

Zhu Ziliu replied, "After we were put in the fire room, there was a girl who often came to visit..."

Xiao Longnu said, "Was she a tall girl with fair complexion and a small mole on one corner of her mouth?"

"Yes," said Zhu Ziliu.

Xiao Longnu smiled at Yang Guo. Then she said to Zhu Ziliu, "That was the Valley Chief's daughter Miss Lu'E. She heard that you two had come to help Yang Guo so she was fond of you. Although she didn't dare to release you, she'd get you whatever you wanted."

Zhu Ziliu said, "Correct. Martial uncle asked her for a branch of the Passion Flowers and I asked her to send my message asking for help. She complied. In the kiln, everyday there would be a time the fires blasted. She would pour water on them to reduce the intensity, making it bearable for us. I often asked her who she was but she never answered. I didn't know she was the Valley Chief's daughter."

"She gave us the directions to come here," said Xiao Longnu.

Yang Guo said, "Great Reverend Yideng is here too."

Zhu Ziliu was delighted. He said, "Oh, let's go."

Yang Guo frowned and said, "Monk Ci'en is also here. I'm afraid there might be a little trouble."

Zhu Ziliu was puzzled. He said, "Brother Ci'en is also here. How can it not be good? When brother and sister meet, Chief Qiu will have no choice but consider this kinship."

Even though he became Reverend Yideng's disciple before Ci'en, in Jianghu Ci'en's kungfu was actually at the same level as that of Reverend Yideng. And so, Diancang, Yuyin and Zhu Ziliu highly respected him, treating him as 'Martial Elder Brother.' Zhu Ziliu had asked Lu'E to send his help message, hoping that Ci'en would come, and the two sides would be reconciled. Now that Yang Guo mentioned trouble, he couldn't quite understand.

Yang Guo briefly told him about Ci'en's mental instability and how Qiu Qianchi was trying to stir up his emotions.

Zhu Ziliu said, "Madame Guo is also here in the valley. That's really the best. Her wisdom is second to none. My master is here to control the situation. Also, Brother Yang's kungfu has reached this improved stage. There shouldn't be any problem. I'm only worried about my Martial Uncle."

Yang Guo also felt that the Indian monk's safety was the first priority. He said, "We could find a place to stay, and wait for Reverend to regain consciousness. The three of us can protect him."

Zhu Ziliu hesitated. He asked, "Where should we go?" He pondered for a long time, feeling that this Passionless Valley was dangerous everywhere. Then he figured out and said, "We wait right here."

Yang Guo was startled but then he understood. With a smile he said, "Uncle Zhu's idea is wonderful. This place seems bad but it actually is the best place in the valley. We just have to stop those valley disciples from leaking our secret."

Zhu Ziliu stretched out his finger. With a laugh he said, "That's easy."

He picked up the Indian monk and said, "We'll rest here in the kiln. May I ask Brother Yang and Mrs. to go help my master?"

Yang Guo remembered that Reverend Yideng's injury had not recovered and that Ci'en had been swaying back and forth between good and evil. If he stayed here to guard the Indian monk, it would be rather selfish and he wouldn't feel comfortable. Seeing Zhu Ziliu carry the Indian monk back into the kiln, he and Xiao Longnu returned to the path they'd just come from.

The two people passed by the Passion Flower thicket. It was bitter cold at this time. Undoubtedly soon there would be no flowers, and the leaves would fall, leaving only ugly bare branches, full of sharp thorns.

Suddenly Yang Guo thought of Li Mochou. He said, "No doubt this thing called passion is sometimes extremely beautiful but other times extremely ugly. Like your martial sister, spring flowers wither quickly but their thorns can still kill people."

Xiao Longnu said, "I hope the Divine Monk can find the antidote to this flower poison. Not only will it cure you, my martial sister can also be saved."

But Yang Guo actually hoped that the Indian monk would regain consciousness and that the Indian monk would first treat the poisons in Xiao Longnu's body. If he didn't wake up

and just passed away, what then? Looking at his wife, his heart was filled with infinite tender feelings. Suddenly, he was hit by a flash of pain in his chest. He knew that because he'd saved the Cheng-Lu cousins, the poison in his body was even more severe. Afraid that he would worry Xiao Longnu, he turned his head to look at the bare branches, appearing to be happy and not paying attention to life and death matters.

By now there was another scene in the main hall of the Passionless Valley. Qiu Qianchi was urging her brother to act. The more she talked, the more ferocious her words became. Reverend Yideng didn't say a word, leaving Ci'en to make a decision for himself. Ci'en looked at his sister. He looked at his master. Then he looked at Huang Rong. One was his blood sister. Another was the master who had changed him. And the third caused his brother's death. His mind fluctuated between kindness and hatred. Good and evil were battling. How would he decide? His entire life from childhood to old age flashed in his brain. Sometimes tears glistened in his eyes, other times a smile came to the corners of his mouth. His heart was aflame for this was fiercer than any battle he'd ever fought in.

Lu Wushuang noticed that Yang Guo had left the hall for a long time and still not returned. Ci'en's state of mind had nothing to do with her whatsoever. She gently tugged at Cheng Ying's gown sleeve and quietly slipped out of the hall. Cheng Ying followed her out. "Where did Sha Dan (Dumb Egg) go?" Lu Wushuang asked.

Cheng Ying didn't reply. She only said, "He's been poisoned and we don't know how bad his condition is."

Lu Wushuang said, "Hmm." She was also worried. In a low-spirited voice, she said, "I really didn't expect this. He and his master finally..."

Cheng Ying said in the same tone, "Miss Long is really beautiful, and she's really good. Only such a person can be a match for Big Brother Yang."

Lu Wushuang said, "How do you know she's a good person? You haven't really talked to her."

Suddenly she heard a cold voice from behind, "Her foot is not lame. Naturally she's good."

Lu Wushuang drew out her Willow Leaf saber, turning her body around. That voice, of course, came from Guo Fu.

Seeing her unsheathed saber, Guo Fu quickly pulled out a long sword from Yelu Qi's waist. She returned the angry glare and shouted, "You want to fight me?"

With a merry laugh Lu Wushuang said, "How come you don't use your own sword?" Her foot had been crippled since childhood, and it was her sore spot. Other people never mentioned this in front of her. Since Guo Fu ridiculed her 'lame foot,' she was enraged, and so she sarcastically brought up the broken sword issue.

Guo Fu barked, "I'm going to use someone else's sword to give you a kungfu lesson."

Having said that, the long sword struck, and the 'weng-weng' sounds echoed.

Lu Wushuang said, "How rude. The Guo family's child doesn't respect her senior. Good, today I'll teach you the difference between good and bad."

"Bah, how can you be my senior?" Guo Fu said.

With a laugh Lu Wushuang said, "My cousin is your Martial Uncle. If you won't call me Gu Gu (paternal aunt) you should

call me Ah-yi (maternal aunt). You can ask my cousin!" Then she pointed at Cheng Ying.

By her mother's order, Guo Fu had to call Cheng Ying 'Martial Uncle.' But deep down, she was still not convinced that her strange grandfather had accepted such a person as a disciple. She thought that she and Cheng Ying were about the same age so Cheng Ying's kungfu shouldn't be very good. She looked at Lu Wushuang and said, "Who knows if she's a real or fake disciple? My grandpa is world famous. There are many shameless people pretending to be his disciples."

Although Cheng Ying's natural disposition was gentle, hearing this she couldn't help getting angry. But her whole heart right now was fixed on Yang Guo, and so she had no intention of bickering with people. She said, "Cousin, let's go... go find Big Brother Yang."

Lu Wushuang nodded. She turned to Guo Fu and said, "Did you hear that? Did she or did she not call me her cousin? Hero Guo and Chief Huang Rong are world famous. I don't know how many shameless people pretend to be their daughter!" Then with a 'hei-hei' cold laugh, she turned to leave.

Guo Fu was slow. She thought, "Who pretends to be my parents' daughter?" But then it dawned on her, "Aiyo! She called me a bastard, saying that I'm not my parents' daughter." Now that she understood the meaning, how could she bear it? She jumped up and thrust her sword towards Lu Wushuang's back.

Hearing the sound of Guo Fu's sword cutting through the air, Lu Wushuang turned and blocked the strike with her saber. With a 'dang' sound, slight pains shot through their arms.

Guo Fu shouted, "Did you call me a bastard?"

The long sword struck again and again. Lu Wushuang blocked the sword left and right. She sneered, "Hero Guo is a righteous hero. Chief Huang is truly the daughter of the Chief of Peach Blossom Island. Their characters are remarkable..."

Guo Fu said, "Who doesn't know that? There is no need to praise my parents to please me." She really thought that Lu Wushuang had sincerely praised her parents, and so her sword slowed down.

But Lu Wushuang continued "You? You cut off Big Brother Yang's arm. You couldn't tell right from wrong, hurting a good person. How could such behavior be anything similar to that of the Guo couple? Makes people wonder."

"Wonder, about what?" Guo Fu asked.

Lu Wushuang darkly said, "You think about it."

Yelu Qi was standing on the side of the scene. He knew that Guo Fu's intelligence was far inferior to Lu Wushuang. If this verbal spat went on, Guo Fu wouldn't be able to stand it. He said, "Miss Guo, let's not talk to her any more."

He could see that Guo Fu's kungfu was more advanced than Lu Wushuang's. If she couldn't win an argument, she would resort to a real fight. Who would have thought that Guo Fu would be blind with rage and not understand his intention? She said, "Don't meddle. I'm asking her to explain what she said."

Lu Wushuang gave Yelu Qi a stare. She said, "A dog that bites visitors will give you trouble in the future."

Yelu Qi blushed, knowing that Lu Wushuang had already figured out his feelings towards Guo Fu. What she meant was that Guo Fu was so irrational that she would give him infinite trouble in the future.

Seeing Yelu Qi blush, Guo Fu was greatly suspicious. She questioned, "You suspect that I'm not my parents' daughter as well?"

Yelu Qi quickly said, "No, no. Let's go. Don't pay attention to her."

Lu Wushuang butted in, "Naturally, he is suspicious. Otherwise, why does he want you to leave so quickly?"

Guo Fu's face reddened, and she pressed her hand on the sword.

Yelu Qi could only advise, "Miss Lu's words are mean and cutting. If you want to test her kungfu, just do it. There's no need to talk."

Lu Wushuang said, "He said you've got a dumb mouth. Talking too much will only reveal what a fool you are."

Guo Fu had feelings for Yelu Qi, and so she was worried that he wouldn't like her. Although other people were talking nonsense, when it involved her loved one, she had to think about it. As she thought about what Lu Wushuang said, she feared that Yelu Qi would really think badly of her. Her parents had doted on her since she was little, and the Wu brothers -- her childhood friends -- had always obeyed her. Except for her occasional quarrels with Yang Guo, she'd never had an argument like this. Today she ran into a ferocious opponent, who outpaced and outwitted her no matter what she said. Realizing that talking would result in more damage, she scolded, "If I don't cripple your other foot today, my name is not Guo." Having said that, her sword moved like the wind, flying towards Lu Wushuang.

Lu Wushuang said, "No need to cripple my foot. Your real name is not Guo anyway. Maybe your name is Zhang or Li." Lu Wushuang carried on calling her a 'bastard.' While they

were exchanging these verbal attacks, the saber and the sword clashed, and the battle became more intense.

The Guo couple had taught their daughter the best of kungfu. Guo Fu was taught all the basics but it was difficult to master the skills in a short period of time. When it came to martial proclivity, Guo Fu had a stronger resemblance to her father and very little in common with her mother. And so, even though her foundation of orthodox kungfu was good, she still needed to refine her skills before she could use any lethal kungfu. Even so, Lu Wushuang wasn't her match. Besides, her retreat wasn't very agile because of a crippled foot. Guo Fu was burning with rage and she kept on attacking. Sword lights flashed as she was trying to stab Lu Wushuang's right leg.

Cheng Ying was watching them fight, her brows creasing with worry. She thought, "Although my cousin's name-calling isn't nice, this Guo girl is too rude and too unreasonable. No wonder Yang Guo's right arm was cut off by her. If they continue to fight, my cousin's right leg will be difficult to save."

She saw Lu Wushuang constantly retreating. Suddenly she heard the 'chi' sound as Lu Wushuang's skirt was ripped open. She let out a soft cry, "Aiyo!"

Lu Wushuang stumbled back, her face pale. Guo Fu quickly took a couple of steps forward and brought her sword around in a horizontal swipe, slashing Lu Wushuang's leg. Seeing that Guo Fu had already won but still kept on attacking and that Lu Wushuang was dangerously cornered, Cheng Ying stepped in gently, using both hands to block Guo Fu.

She said, "Miss Guo, please go light on her."

Guo Fu lifted her sword. Seeing blood on the blade, she knew that Lu Wushuang had already been injured. She pointed her

sword proudly at Lu Wushuang and said, "My lesson today will teach you not to spout nonsense again."

The sword wound on Lu Wushuang's leg was aching. She angrily said, "Are you going to use your sword to stop people from talking?" She knew that Guo Fu basked in her parents' glory, so she pretended to say that Guo Fu was not Guo Jing and Huang Rong's daughter.

Guo Fu shouted, "What did they say?" She moved forward a step, with the tip of her sword straight towards Lu Wushuang's chest.

Cheng Ying stepped in between them. Seeing the long sword arrive, she used three fingers to hold the blade and gently pushed it aside. She persuaded, "Cousin, Miss Guo, we are in the middle of danger here. Let's stop this senseless fight."

Her sword was brushed aside by Cheng Ying's bare hand. Guo Fu was half-startled and half-angry. She shouted, "Are you helping her? Good, good, good. Even two on one, I'm not afraid. Draw out your weapon!" After she said that, she pointed her long sword at Cheng Ying's waist preparing to thrust. She waited calmly for her to pull out the jade flute from her waist.

With a faint smile Cheng Ying said, "I just asked you two not to fight, how can I fight you myself? Brother Yelu, please come and talk to Miss Guo."

"Yes. Miss Guo, we are in the enemy territory. We've got to be careful everywhere we go." Yelu Qi said.

Guo Fu quickly said, "Good. You don't help me. Instead, you help an outsider." Seeing that Cheng Ying was a girl of beauty and grace, she suddenly thought to herself, "Is he interested in her?"

Yelu Qi had no clue what she was thinking. He continued, "That monk Ci'en looked quite strange. Let's go back to the hall and watch him."

Lu Wushuang heard Guo Fu's words and saw the look on her face. She understood what Guo Fu was worried about. She said, "Compared to you, my cousin is prettier. Her behavior is gentler. And she had better kungfu. You've got to be very, very careful."

These four sentences pierced Guo Fu's heart. Nervously she asked, "Careful about what?"

Lu Wushuang sneered, "Even if I were an idiot, I would still prefer my cousin. You are rude and vicious, what's so good about you?"

These words were so obvious, how could Guo Fu stand them? Her long sword flew out, swerving around Cheng Ying and flying towards Lu Wushuang.

This move of hers was called the 'Jade Stance Guiding Silver Arrow,' which was one of Huang Rong's family techniques. The blade was swung in an arc and would strike the side of the target. The move appeared to be without haste but the damage zone was wide. Only one with higher sword skills would be able to block such a blow; otherwise, it was extremely difficult to escape.

Cheng Ying frowned. She thought to herself, "Why is this girl using her fiercest stance? My cousin only offends you with words. She isn't your most hateful enemy. Why are you acting like you mean to kill a murderer?"

Fortunately, Huang Yaoshi had earlier taught her this sword stance. And so, she sent energy to her fingers, waiting for Guo Fu's sword swing. Then with a clang, the long sword shot to the ground.

The technique Cheng Ying had just used was called 'Divine Flicking Finger.' But it came out strong only because Cheng Ying had understood Guo Fu's technique and waited to strike when the power in Guo Fu's sword dropped. Otherwise, since the two people's martial skills were about the same level, Cheng Ying wouldn't have been able to disarm Guo Fu with her fingers. Cheng Ying used her left foot to step on the long sword and the jade flute in her hand pointed at Guo Fu's pressure point on her waist.

In a flash Cheng Ying had knocked Guo Fu's sword out of her hand, stepped on it, and threatened Guo Fu's pressure point. Guo Fu was in an extremely awkward situation. If she bent down to snatch the sword, the pressure point on her waist would be exposed. But if she jumped backwards, her long sword would of course be taken. Although her kungfu was not weak, she lacked battle experiences. At the moment, she was blushing profusely, not knowing what to do.

Yelu Qi shouted, "Hey, girl. Why did you step on my weapon?"

Then he leaned forward to grab the jade flute. Cheng Ying retracted her arm, and then she turned around to leave, pulling Lu Wushuang along with her.

Guo Fu snatched the long sword back. She called out, "Slow down, let's see who the better person is."

Lu Wushuang turned her head back and said, "Still want to..."

Cheng Ying grabbed her arm, dragging her cousin along. The two people were already twenty or thirty feet away from them, and so Lu Wushuang didn't get to finish her sentence.

Yelu Qi said, "Miss Guo, she was just lucky with that move. Actually, the two of you are equals."

Guo Fu bitterly said, "Right. I was swinging my sword in an arc. Before I could hit her, she took advantage of the moment the strength on my sword was void. I didn't expect someone who looked quite refined to be sly like that."

"Hmm." Yelu Qi made a sound. He was a straight person. Not wanting to falsely flatter her, he said, "Miss Cheng's kungfu isn't weak. If you fight with her another time, you can't underestimate her as an opponent."

Hearing him commend Cheng Ying, Guo Fu frowned darkly. She couldn't bear it and so she said, "Did you say her kungfu was good?"

Yelu Qi replied, "Yes."

Guo Fu angrily said, "Then don't mind me. Just go, be with her." As she said that she turned around.

Yelu Qi said, "I advised you not to underestimate the opponent. I asked you to be careful. Am I helping you, or am I helping her?" Now that Yelu Qi had explained that he wanted her to protect herself, Guo Fu couldn't help but smile.

Yelu Qi continued, "Didn't I help you get the sword back? Why are you still blaming me?"

Guo Fu turned her head back and said, "I'm not. I'm not. I'm not blaming you!" A happy smile filled her face. Yelu Qi was delighted but suddenly he heard repeated roars from inside the hall, accompanied by the interminable sounds of metal clanking.

Guo Fu cried out, "Aiyo, let's go quickly and take a look."

Originally, while listening to Qiu Qianchi ramble on about decades-ago events she did not realizing that a crisis was looming, the more she listened, the more annoyed she became. So she slipped out of the hall and ran into the

Cheng-Lu cousins and fought with them. Now that she heard the strange sounds, her thoughts were on her mother. She rushed back into the hall.

In the middle of the hall Reverend Yideng sat cross-legged, holding a string of Buddhist rosary beads in his hands and reciting Buddhist sutras. He had a gentle look on his face. Monk Ci'en paced back and forth in the hall and often let out a roar, which sounded incredibly wicked. His hands were shackled, but the chain that linked the two cuffs had already been broken. When the two parts struck against each other, a clanking sound echoed in the hall. Qiu Qianchi also sat in the hall, her complexion pale. She was already ugly but at this time she looked fearsome. Huang Rong and Wu Santong were standing in a corner of the hall, intensely watching Ci'en.

Ci'en had been pacing around in a fit of insanity, and beads of sweat dripped profusely from his forehead. White steam emitted from the top of his head, looking like white clouds. These clouds were growing denser. And the more he paced, the faster he became. Reverend Yideng suddenly used his inner energy to shout, "Ci'en, Ci'en, distinguish between good and evil. Have you meditated today?"

Ci'en turned dull, his body swaying. He threw himself on the floor.

Qiu Qianchi shouted, "E'er, quickly go help your uncle up."

Gongsun Lu'E did as told. Ci'en opened his eyes and saw Lu'E's face. In his daze, Lu'E's beautiful face, with long eyebrows and thin lips, looked very much like his sister when she was young. He cried out, "Third sister, where am I?"

Lu'E said, "Uncle, I'm Lu'E."

Ci'en muttered, "Uncle... who is your uncle? Who are you talking about?"

Qiu Qianchi shouted, "Second brother, she's your third sister's daughter. She wanted to meet her first uncle."

Ci'en was startled. He said, "My big brother? You can't meet him. He's already fallen to death from the Iron Palms summit. His body was all gone." Then he jumped up. He looked at Huang Rong and shouted, "Huang Rong, you killed my big brother, you'll pay for it!"

Arriving back in the hall, Guo Fu had stayed by her mother's side, carrying her younger sister in her arms. Now that she saw Ci'en pointing his finger at her mother and scolding her, she couldn't stand it. And so, she stepped forward and said, "Monk, if you are rude again, this young girl won't stand for it."

Qiu Qianchi sneered, "This young girl is fearless..."

Ci'en asked, "Who are you?"

"Hero Guo is my father and Chief Huang is my mother," replied Guo Fu.

Ci'en asked, "And the baby you are holding?"

Guo Fu said, "She's my little sister."

In a severe tone Ci'en said, "Humph, surprisingly Guo Jing and Huang Rong have two children."

Hearing a strange tone in his voice, Huang Rong shouted, "Fu'er, get back here, quickly!"

Guo Fu saw that Ci'en was acting like a madman. After all this talking, he still hadn't begun fighting. She thought he was afraid of her mother so she didn't fear him. Instead, she moved a couple of steps forward. With a laugh she said, "If

there's revenge to extract, just get on with it. If not, don't open your mouth!"

Ci'en shouted, "I will extract my revenge!"

His voice ripped through the air like a clap of thunder, and all the teacups were making 'dang-dang' rattling sounds. Guo Fu couldn't move her hands and feet. She only saw his left and right hands coming at her with the force of a mountain being cast into the sea. She wanted to escape, but how could there be enough time?

As if by prior arrangement, Huang Rong, Wu Santong, and Yelu Qi jumped up into the air at the same time. The three people all noticed that even though Ci'en's right hand was fierce, his left palm was far more lethal. So they all aimed at his left palm, and the four palms clashed with a 'peng' sound.

Ci'en let out a 'hei' sound and stood still but the three people fell back several steps. With the lowest skills, Yelu Qi was knocked back the furthest, and next to him was Huang Rong. Before she could steady herself, she saw that her daughter Guo Xiang had already been snatched by Ci'en. Guo Fu just stood there dumbly too frightened to escape.

Huang Rong was alarmed. She thought, "Was Fu'er hurt by that palm strike?" Immediately she jumped up and out, her left hand pulling Guo Fu back. She wielded the "Dog Beating Stick" with her right hand, using the 'seal' trick. Although Ci'en's palms were fierce, he couldn't hurt her this time. Guo Fu was actually not injured but she was confused. Now that she leaned against her mother's body, she could let out an 'ah' cry.

As the battle began, the Wu brothers, Yelu Yan, and Wanyan Ping unsheathed their weapons. Qiu Qianchi signaled the many valley disciples to scatter, waiting for her order to besiege them. Only Reverend Yideng was still sitting cross-

legged in the center of the hall as if he didn't see all these things. He was reciting Buddhist sutras. His voice was not loud, but very clear.

Ci'en lifted Guo Xiang. He shouted, "This is Guo Jing and Huang Rong's daughter. I'll kill this girl first, and then I'll kill Huang Rong!"

Qiu Qianchi said in delight, "Good second brother! You are really the world-famous "Iron Palms Floating on Water", Chief Qiu!"

In this situation, Huang Rong and the others couldn't defeat Ci'en in battle without anybody getting hurt; they didn't even have a way to save the baby from this mad man.

In a loud voice Guo Fu suddenly shouted, "Yang Guo, big brother Yang, quickly come and save my little sister."

When facing a disaster, Yang Guo had always come out of nowhere to save her. Seeing that nobody could do anything at this time, she naturally hoped that Yang Guo would come to her rescue again. But at the moment Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were enjoying their time together. The two people walked slowly hand in hand, watching the sunset. How could they know about this urgent situation in the hall?

Ci'en used his right hand to hold Guo Xiang high above his head and brought his left palm on guard.

He sneered, "Yang Guo? Who's Yang Guo? Now even if East Heretic, West Venom, South Emperor, North Beggar, and Central Divinity all came at once, they could only kill me, Qiu Qianren, but they wouldn't be able to save this baby."

Yideng slowly lifted his head and saw blood lust and murderous intent in Ci'en's eyes. He said, "You want to seek revenge on people, people will then come and take revenge on you. What good can come of it?"

Ci'en shouted, "If they dare, come!" Now dusk had begun to fall, and the evening light entered the hall. Despair showed in everyone's eyes, while his face looked absolutely terrifying.

Suddenly Huang Rong let out a 'ha-ha' laugh, her voice alternating between high and low pitches, like a lunatic. The people couldn't help being frightened.

Guo Fu cried out "Ma!"

Wu Santong and Yelu Qi called out in one voice "Madame Guo!" Their hearts were thumping wildly, thinking that she'd gone insane because the enemy had her daughter. She tossed her "Dog Beating Stick" to the floor, moving a couple of steps forward. Her laugh sounded mournful and shrill.

"Ma!" Guo Fu called out and tried to grab her arm. Huang Rong brushed Guo Fu aside with her right hand and jumped towards Ci'en with a miserable cry.

Even Qiu Qianchi hadn't expected this. She stared at Huang Rong in disbelief.

Huang Rong stretched out both hands and gave Ci'en an evil stare. She cried out, "Quickly kill this child. Hit her hard. You can't spare her."

Color left Ci'en's face. He held Guo Xiang close to his chest and said, "You... you... who are you?"

Huang Rong laughed crazily, her arms flinging out. Although Ci'en's left palm was on guard, he didn't dare to strike. He sidestepped and asked again, "Who are you?"

Huang Rong sadly replied, "Have you completely forgotten? One evening in the Dali Imperial Palace, you held a small child like this in your hand. Right, it was... it was.. You injured him badly and he eventually died. I am this child's mother.

Kill this child quickly. Kill this child quickly. What are you waiting for?"

Ci'en listened to her, and his whole body trembled. Events of decades-ago flashed in his mind.

Years ago, he'd injured Dali Imperial Concubine Liu's child, hoping that the South Emperor would use years of cultivated inner energy to treat the child's injury. But Emperor Duan had been cruel enough to let the child meet a violent death. Afterwards Concubine Liu and Ci'en had run into each other twice and she fought like a mad tiger, willing to die together with him. Although Ci'en's kungfu was superior, he actually didn't dare to fight her; instead he fled into the wasteland. Huang Rong had twice met Yinggu, on the Black Dragon beach and at the top of Mount Hua and seen her insane smile. She'd known that this was Ci'en's biggest worry. And so, seeing Ci'en holding Guo Xiang in his arms but unable to harm her, she'd told him to kill Guo Xiang. Wu Santong, Qiu Qianchi, Yelu Qi and the others all thought that she'd gone totally insane. Only Reverend Yideng secretly admired Huang Rong for her great wisdom and courage. He thought to himself that a strong man wouldn't have the gall to come up with such a scheme and say "Kill the child quickly." When Ci'en was frighteningly violent like this, if he hit Guo Xiang even lightly, how could she not die a sudden death?

Ci'en looked at Huang Rong and Yideng. Then his eyes turned to the child in his hand. A surge of pain and regret suddenly hit him, and he sobbed, "He was dead! He was dead! The child was alive and well, and I killed him."

He stepped towards Huang Rong and handed Guo Xiang to her. He said, "I killed this small baby. Please beat me to death!"

Overjoyed, Huang Rong reached out to take Guo Xiang. But then Yideng shouted, "Revenge breeds revenge; when will it

stop? Your hand holds a murderous blade. When will you throw it away?"

Ci'en was startled, and Guo Xiang fell from his hand.

Huang Rong didn't wait for Guo Xiang to fall to the floor, her right foot flew out. She kicked the child, sending her out in the air. At the same time, she laughed crazily and said, "You killed the child. Good. Good. This is wonderful."

Her kick looked as if it was fierce but when her foot touched Guo Xiang's waist, it actually stopped her from falling and gently sent her out again into the air. She knew that this was an extremely critical moment. If she bent down to pick up her daughter, perhaps Ci'en would change his mind.

Guo Xiang flew through the air towards Yelu Qi. He caught her and saw that her black eyes were sparkling, and that her little mouth was about to let out a big cry. She was indeed unharmed. He was first startled and then understood that Huang Rong, knowing that Guo Fu was rash, sent him her daughter. So, he covered the child's mouth with his palm and shouted, "Aiyo, the child was killed by the monk."

Ci'en's face was deathly pale. All of a sudden he was awakened. He put his hands together and bowed to Yideng. He said, "Great monk, many thanks for saving me!"

Yideng bowed back and said, "Congratulations, great monk. You've found the right path!" The two monks exchanged a smile. Ci'en ran out.

Qiu Qianchi quickly called out, "Second Brother, Second Brother, you come back!"

Ci'en turned his head back and said, "You call me to come back; I'm now asking you to come back too." Having said that his gown sleeves flared out, and he floated out of the hall.

With a joyful expression on his face Yideng said, "Good, good, good!" Then he retreated to a corner of the hall. He lowered his head, his eyebrows drooping, and said no more.

Huang Rong fixed her hair and got Guo Xiang back from Yelu Qi. Seeing that her mother was normal and her little sister was all right, Guo Fu was pleasantly surprised. She threw herself into her mother's arms and said, "Ma, I thought you really went insane!"

Huang Rong walked over to Yideng and kowtowed. She said, "I (niece) had no other way but to mention that past affair. Reverend, please forgive me."

With a faint smile Yideng replied, "Rong'er, Rong'er, you are really the female Zhuge!"

In the hall, Wu Santong was the only person who knew about the past events. Others were looking perplexed at one another.

After this unexpected turn of events, Qiu Qianchi saw her brother going out the screened door. She thought about how she wouldn't see him again and couldn't help becoming heavy-hearted. His words "You call me to come back, I'm now asking to you come back too" sounded like advice, urging her to control herself, repent and be salvaged. She secretly felt a pang of regret but her regret disappeared in a flash. All of a sudden, she proudly said, "Everybody, please wait here, I'm afraid this old woman can't keep you company."

Huang Rong said, "Hold on a minute! We've come here today to ask for the Passionless Pill..."

Qiu Qianchi nodded at her numerous disciples and they all responded with a war cry. Each entrance was blocked by four disciples in green, with an adorned fishnet in their hands.

Four maids lifted Qiu Qianchi's chair and retreated to the inner hall.

Seeing the power of the fishnets, Huang Rong, Wu Santong, Yelu Qi, and the others were secretly alarmed. They thought, "These fishnets are deadly, how can we break out of the trap?"

While they were hesitating, both the front door and the back door of the hall were being pulled shut, and the disciples in green all squeezed out. The Wu Brothers struck one of the doors with their swords. With a 'peng' sound, their double swords were caught in the crack of the door and immediately snapped. It seemed that these doors were cast from metal after all.

In a low voice Huang Rong said, "No need to be frightened! Even if we aren't allowed to leave the hall, we can still think of a way to defeat those fishnets and get the antidote to help Yang Guo."

Gongsun Lu'E followed her mother into the inner hall. She asked, "Ma, what should we do?"

Seeing that her brother had abruptly departed and that skilled enemies were gathering, Qiu Qianchi knew she had a big problem. But the murderer of her brother had arrived; no matter who tried to persuade her, she would never yield. With a slight hesitation she said, "Go take a look. What are Yang Guo and those three girls doing?" This was actually what Lu'E had wanted to do. She nodded in compliance and left for the kiln.

As she was halfway to the kiln, she heard voices ahead of her. It was Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu talking. It seemed that they said something about 'Miss Gongsun.' By this time, the sky had become totally dark, and Lu'E hid herself in a willow grove nearby. She thought, "What are they talking about?"

She gingerly stepped forward, approaching them without making a sound. She saw Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu standing side by side.

Yang Guo said, "You said these matters revolved around Miss Gongsun. That's absolutely right. If the Divine Monk wakes up, all past animosity is buried, and all the poisons are expelled, won't that be wonderful? Aiyo!"

Lu'E jumped as Yang Guo let out a sudden cry, not knowing what had just happened to him. She was worried and couldn't help poking her head out to look around. In the darkness, she saw Yang Guo fall to the ground.

Xiao Longnu hoarsely said, "The Passion Flower poison is acting up again?"

"Mmm...aah..." Yang Guo could only let out a groan.

This pain was very difficult to endure. Lu'E pitied him and thought to herself, "He's already taken half of the Passionless pill. He needs the other half to get rid of the poisons, and he can only get this other half from mother."

After a while, Yang Guo got up and let out a long gasp.

Xiao Longnu said, "Your seizures are getting more and more frequent, and every time more severe than the last one. The Divine Monk still has to regain consciousness before he can find the antidote. Even then, there may not necessarily... there may not necessarily... You must be in a lot of pain." She'd wanted to say "there may not necessarily be enough time" but she changed her last sentence.

With a bitter smile Yang Guo said, "This old Madame Gongsun is extremely stubborn. She's hidden the antidote. Unless she wants to give it to me herself, even if we kill everybody in the valley and hold a knife against her neck, she still won't give it up."

“But I actually have a method,” said Xiao Longnu.

Yang Guo could guess what she was thinking and so he said, “Long’er, don’t say it. We...husband and wife, sincerely love each other. If we can grow old together, naturally we’ll thank heaven and earth. If something bad happens, its fate. No third person may come between the two of us.”

Xiao Longnu sobbed, “That Gongsun girl... She looks like a very good person. She will listen to me.”

Lu’E’s heart shook, understanding that Xiao Longnu was urging Yang Guo to marry her to save his own life. But then she heard Yang Guo’s reply.

In a resonant voice he said, “Miss Gongsun is a naturally good person. There are really quite a few good girls, aren’t there? Miss Cheng Ying and Miss Lu Wushuang were also the kind of girls who love deeply. But your heart and mine are one, how can we let other people intervene? You think, if there was a man who could get rid of the poisons in your body and he wanted you to give up your body, would you or would you not agree to it?”

“I’m a female. That would be unthinkable,” replied Xiao Longnu.

With a chuckle Yang Guo said, “To others, men are superior to women. To Yang Guo, it’s the other way around...” As he was saying this, he suddenly heard a sound coming from a dense thicket. Yang Guo asked, “Who is it?”

Lu’E thought she’d been spotted and was about to reply. Suddenly she heard a female voice, “Dumb egg, it’s me!”

Then she saw Lu Wushuang and Cheng Ying step out from behind a thicket. And so, she used this opportunity to move back quietly. Her mind was in turmoil.

She thought, "Aside from comparing myself to Miss Long, look at Miss Cheng and Miss Lu's beauty, kungfu, and past friendship with Yang Guo, how can I ever match them?"

When she met Yang Guo, she couldn't help falling in love with him. She'd known that he was serious about Xiao Longnu but, deep in her heart, she still hoped that he could take two wives. Now that she'd heard his words, she realized that all her hopes were in vain. She'd been sad since she was little but today she was completely disheartened. She made up her mind that she no longer wanted to live, and then she walked away westward. Low-spirited, she walked aimlessly. She didn't know where she was. There was only a voice in her head, "I don't want to live anymore. I don't want to live anymore."

She didn't know how long she'd been walking when, suddenly, she heard voices coming from behind some mountain rocks. She pulled herself together feeling slightly startled. She'd been wandering about aimlessly, and to her own surprise she'd arrived on the west side of the valley where very few people frequented. She looked up and saw a mountain peak rising towards the sky. This was the most dangerous zone of the Passionless Peak.

On this mountain ledge, she could see the three letters 'Broken Heart Cliff' that someone had carved on the cliff ages ago, and twenty or thirty feet in front of her was a slippery and barren ledge where not even a blade of grass was seen. The place was enveloped by a blanket of fog all year long, and the wind here was so violent that even a bird would find it difficult to perch on this cliff top. Beyond and below was an abyss of shadows that no one could see the bottom of. The area surrounding the 'Broken Heart Cliff' was quiet and beautiful because the terrain was so rugged and dangerous. Slippery rocks made it very easy to fall into the abyss below. The valley dwellers stayed clear of this area, and even those

disciples in green with their kungfu wouldn't dare to come here. This being the case, she didn't know whose voices she was hearing.

Originally Gongsun Lu'E was resigned to die but at this moment she became curious. She hid herself behind a rock pile and listened. Her heart jumped as she learned that it was her father talking. Although her father had wronged her mother and had been ruthless with her, she was still his daughter. She'd been worried about him since her mother blinded one of his eyes with a date stone and banished him from the Passionless Valley. Hearing the familiar voice, she now knew that he hadn't left the valley. Instead, he'd come to this remote place to hide. She was secretly happy.

Then she heard him talk, "You've been beaten black and blue, and I actually lost my eye. It's all because of that small thief Yang Guo. Not only do we have a common enemy, we share the same problem." After saying that he smiled, but the other person didn't reply. Lu'E felt this was quite strange. Who was her father talking to? His tone was faintly frivolous, was that person a female?

Then Gongsun Zhi continued, "We ran into each other at this rarely-frequented place. We were thousands of li apart, yet we met as if by predestination. It must be fate."

That female let out a 'pei' sound in contempt. She angrily said, "I've been thoroughly injured by the Passion Flowers. Yet, you made light of it and mock me with such laughable nonsense."

Lu'E thought to herself, "Oh, it's Li Mochou who just broke into the valley today."

Then she heard Gongsun Zhi quickly say, "No, no. Why would I make light of it? Naturally I will do all I can. Your body is in pain, so is my heart."

The person Gongsun Zhi was talking to was of course Li Mochou. Her whole body was pricked by the Passion Flowers, and so the poison in her body was not small. Luckily she was filled with anger and hatred towards heaven and earth, not the sentiments between man and woman, and so her body wasn't in that much pain. But she knew that the poison was deadly. While urgently searching for the antidote, she wandered about aimlessly on the crisscrossing paths inside the valley and unexpectedly arrived at this Broken Heart Cliff. Gongsun Zhi had actually been here for a long time, hiding from all the valley people and waiting for the right moment to kill Qiu Qianchi and reclaim his Valley Chief position.

The two of them had once fought so they both knew each other's skills. After they met, they thought, "I'm having trouble in this valley, I could use some help." By this short exchange of words, they were actually trying to strike a bargain.

Since the death of his beloved Rou'er years ago, Gongsun Zhi had been concentrating on his kungfu practice and ignoring beautiful females. But then he failed to marry Xiao Longnu. His long-suppressed lust gushed out like a broken dam, out of control. With his status, his attempt to abduct Wanyan Ping was considered extremely low in Jianghu. Now that he'd run into Li Mochou and saw her beauty, he thought, "After I kill that evil woman Qiu Qianchi, I'd better marry this woman. With her kungfu, she's exactly my match."

What he didn't know was that Li Mochou was extremely vicious and without mercy and that the cause of her evil was none other than this 'passion.' At the moment, Gongsun Zhi's words had become bolder and bolder, how could she not be enraged? But she wanted the antidote, so she had no choice but to feign interest, offering a perfunctory reply.

Gongsun Zhi said, "I'm the original chief of the valley. There's no second person in the world who knows how to make the antidote to this flower poison. But the manufacturing process is time-consuming, and you won't have enough time for that. Luckily, there's one pill left in the valley, in that evil woman's hand. Let us go get rid of her, then everything will be yours."

His last sentence had a double meaning. It actually meant that not only would she get the antidote, she would also become the mistress of the Passionless Valley. That Gongsun Zhi was the only person in the world who knew how to make the antidote was not a lie. Passion Flowers had grown in this valley for a long time, and Gongsun Zhi's ancestors had taken many lives, experimenting to get the right antidote. These passionless flowers stopped outsiders from entering the valley so of course they didn't get rid of them. Anyhow, the antidote formula was only handed down from father to son so it wouldn't fall into the hands of other people.

Even Qiu Qianchi only knew that the pills they had were left by the previous generation and that the antidote formula had already been lost. But what Gongsun Zhi actually didn't know was that Qiu Qianchi only had half a pill left.

Li Mochou hesitated and said, "Since it is so, aren't you making an empty promise? Your wife has the antidote but you and she have become enemies. Even though killing her isn't that hard, how will you actually get the antidote?"

Gongsun Zhi hesitated to reply. After a while he said, "Taoist Li, you and I have met by fate. Even if I die I have no regrets."

Li Mochou blandly said, "You flatter me."

Gongsun Zhi said, "I've got a plan. I can capture that evil person and force her to give up the pill. But I hope you can promise me one thing."

Li Mochou said in agitation, "I've roamed Jianghu all my life. I come and go as I please and no one can ever force me to do anything. If you are willing to give me the antidote, do it. If not, just drop it. How can it be that I, Li Mochou, would ever beg for my life?"

Although Gongsun Zhi's kungfu was strong, he'd been secluded in the valley his entire life. As a result, he didn't know about Jianghu's most ferocious characters. He only knew a little about decades-ago names that Qiu Qianchi had mentioned. Over the past ten years, the name Scarlet Serpent Deity Li Mochou had shaken Jianghu, and there was no one in the martial world who didn't know that. Although Li Mochou did look like a peach, her heart was that of a serpent. Gongsun Zhi actually didn't know any of this. As he heard her arrogant words, he was very pleased.

He quickly said, "You misunderstood my meaning. I only hoped you would do something for me. How could it be that I was forcing you? To snatch the antidote, we have to kill my daughter. If I said something inappropriate, please don't be offended." Gongsun Lu'E was hiding behind a big rock. Hearing 'we have to kill my daughter,' she couldn't help but tremble.

Li Mochou was also taken aback. "The antidote is in your daughter's hands?"

"No," replied Gongsun Zhi. "I'll tell you the truth! That evil woman is excessively stubborn and violent. The antidote must be hidden in an extremely concealed place and we cannot possibly force her to hand it over. We can only resort to trickery, it's the only way."

"That sounds correct," said Li Mochou, nodding in agreement.

“That wretch is heartless to everyone and there are no limits to her viciousness. However she does care for her daughter and her alone. We can use this to our advantage. I’ll trick Lu’E so you can capture her and toss her into the flower thickets, then that evil woman will have no choice but to retrieve the Passionless Pill to save her daughter. We’ll seize this opportunity to snatch it – there’s no reason why we’ll fail. It’s a pity there’s only one Passionless Pill in the world, and since it’s going to you, my daughter’s life cannot be saved.”

“We don’t actually have to use real Passion Flowers to prick your daughter. We just need to put on an act and make her seem like she’s poisoned – this way, we get the pill and your daughter stays safe.”

Gongsun Zhi sighed. “That wretch is extremely shrewd. If my daughter was merely poisoned by something else, it will not go unnoticed.” His voice became constrained towards the end and he choked, as if he was really becoming emotional.

Li Mochou said, “How can I let your daughter be harmed in exchange for my life? It seems also that you are reluctant to part with her. Let’s drop this matter.”

Gongsun Zhi said hurriedly; “No...no! Although I hate to part with her, it would be worse to part with you.”

Li Mochou remained silent, admitting as much that there really was no other way.

“Let’s wait here,” said Gongsun Zhi. “I’ll call her out when it’s past midnight. Clever she might be, but she would never guess that her father has got something up his sleeve.”

Gongsun Lu’E heard every sentence that had just transpired between the two, and the more she dwelled on it the more she was afraid. When Gongsun Zhi dropped her and Yang Guo into the alligator pit that day, she knew her father cared

naught of their father-daughter relationship. But that day's events could be explained as a rash fit of anger. This day, he had actually plotted and schemed to end his daughter's life in order to please a woman he had just met. His heartlessness and cruelty truly exceeded that of the most savage beasts.

Gongsun Lu'E had originally lost her will to live, but when she heard them plotting her murder, she instinctively wanted to try and escape. It was a good thing that the area had plenty of hills and dense forests, making hiding places aplenty. And so she lightly took one step back, and after a few moments, took another step back. In this manner, she retreated tens of feet before finally turning around to flee.

After an hour's journey, she was far from Passionless Valley. Knowing her father would come for her soon, she didn't even dare to return to her bedroom. She sat perched on a rock, desolate. The cold wind pierced her flesh and the pale moon shone mercilessly down. There was nothing left in this world that she longed for, and she mumbled to herself, "I didn't want to go on living anyway. Why did you still devise this plot to kill me, father? If you want to kill me, come along and kill me. It's very strange, why did I escape?"

Suddenly, a notion struck her like a bolt of lightning: Father is vicious, but his scheme is brilliant. Since I'm going to commit suicide anyway, I might as well use his scheme to trick the Pill from mother and save Brother Yang. Then you, husband and wife, will have me to thank for your reunion – me, the ill-fated girl who cared for him with all her heart. At this thought, her heart was filled with a mixture of gladness and sorrow, but nevertheless she found her energy once again. She glanced at her surroundings to ascertain her location. Then, she rose and walked towards her mother's bedroom.

When she passed by the Passionless Flowers, she severed two flower stalks. Holding them in her hands, she walked to her mother's bedroom door and called in a low voice, "Mother, are you asleep?"

Qiu Qianchi answered from her room, "E'er, what is it?"

Lu'E cried, "Mother, mother! I've been pricked by the Passion Flowers." As she spoke, she embraced the flower stalks and pushed down forcefully onto her chest.

The hundreds and thousands of little thorns sank into her flesh all at once. Since her childhood she had been repeatedly warned against getting pricked by the flowers. Because she did not have the capacity for such risks then, she suffered no serious injury despite being pricked occasionally. But as she grew up, the warnings from people around her became sterner. After more than 10 years of cautiously avoiding this object – to think that now, she was actually pricking herself on purpose! The pain in her heart grew a level deeper and she grits her teeth, calling again and again, "Mother!"

Shocked to hear that something was wrong with her, Qiu Qianchi anxiously ordered the maidservants to open the door and help Lu'E inside. Lu'E exclaimed, "I have the Passion Flower thorns in my body, you can't come near me." The color drained from the two maidservants' faces and they opened the room door wide, allowing Lu'E to walk in herself. How would they dare to touch her body?

Upon seeing her daughter's shivering body with a face as pale as death, and with two Passion Flower stalks hanging from her chest, Qiu Qianchi asked hurriedly, "What happened to you? What happened?"

Lu'E cried, "Its father...Its father!" Afraid of her mother's suffocating gaze, she lowered her head, not daring to make

eye contact.

Qiu Qianchi said furiously, "And you still call him 'father'? What did that old thief do?"

"He... he..."

"Lift up your head and let me see you."

Lu'E obeyed and met her mother's frightening eyes. She shivered and said, "He... he was speaking secretively with the pretty Taoist priestess on Duan Chang Cliff... the priestess that came to the Valley today. I hid behind a rock to hear what they were saying..." Up till now, Lu'E had been speaking the truth. But after this point she would have to spin a lie, and afraid her mother would notice something unusual, she lowered her head.

Qiu Qianchi pressed, "What did the two of them say?"

Lu'E said, "They spoke of being together in illness, and something about being extraordinarily fated. They... they kept calling you 'wretch' and 'evil woman', and I couldn't stomach it..." At this, she started weeping.

Grinding her teeth, Qiu Qianchi said, "Don't cry...don't cry! What happened next?"

"I accidentally moved from my position, and they realized my presence. That priestess... that priestess then pushed me into the flower thickets."

Sensing hesitation in her tone, Qiu Qianchi said, "No, you're lying! What really happened? Don't even think of hiding it from me."

Lu'E broke out in cold sweat. "I didn't lie to you, this... aren't these Passion Flowers?"

"There was something wrong with your intonation," said Qiu Qianchi. "You have been like this since young, unable to tell lies of any sort. How would I, as your mother, not know this?"

An idea came to Lu'E and she said, "Mother, I was lying, it was actually father who pushed me into the thickets. He was angry at me for following you and helping you, saying that I only wanted mother and not father. He... he was trying his utmost to please that pretty Taoist priestess."

Qiu Qianchi hated her husband to the core and Lu'E's words struck precisely at her heart's threshold, suiting her perfectly. Immediately she had no further doubts and took Lu'E's lies to be true. She hurriedly held her daughter's hand and said gently, "Lu'E, don't be afraid, your mother will deal with that old thief. There was always going to be a time where we finally vented this hatred in our hearts." She then ordered the maidservants to bring her a pair of scissors and tweezers. First she removed the stalks from Lu'E's chest, and then used the tweezers to extract the broken thorns.

Choking with grief, Lu'E said, "Mother, I don't think I'll survive this time round."

"Don't worry, we still have one half of the Passionless Pill," said Qiu Qianchi. "Luckily we didn't waste it on that heartless scoundrel Yang Guo. After taking the half Pill, you still won't be totally rid of the poison but if you be good and stay by mother, completely ignoring all worthless men, or even completely shutting them out from your thoughts, then you'll definitely be safe." Qiu Qianchi had bitterly endured her husband's torture, and then Yang Guo refused to become her son-in-law. She hated all the world's men with a vengeance, and there would be nothing better than if her daughter remained unmarried all her life.

Lu'E frowned in silence. Qiu Qianchi asked, "Where's that old thief and the Taoist priestess? Where are they?"

Lu'E replied, "I struggled up from the flower thickets and didn't dare look back. They're probably still there."

Qiu Qianchi thought to herself: "Now that the old thief has found a powerful helper, he will definitely return to claim back the Valley. The disciples here are all probably his followers. In a confrontation, they would undoubtedly help the old thief. Either that or they will just sit on the fence, not helping any side, but they will definitely not oppose him. All my limbs are crippled and I can only use my date stone skill. If fired at an unprepared opponent, its power is extremely great. But that old thief will be on his guard and I will probably not be able to withstand his attacks. If he uses the tablet to attack, then I will be left with no devices. What, then, should I do?" Qiu Qianchi's eyes flickered as she remained silent, deep in thought.

Thinking that her mother was now deliberating if her words were truth or fallacy, she was terrified that more questions would be asked and the truth exposed, eventually. Her own pain and suffering was secondary, but if she failed to get the Passionless Pill, Yang Guo would never be rid of the poison. The moment Yang Guo flitted into her mind, a huge pain seized her chest and she let out a cry. Qiu Qianchi reached out and caressed her daughter's hair, saying, "Let's go and retrieve the Passionless Pill." With two claps of her hand, the maidservants carried her chair out of the room.

Ever since Yang Guo left the valley previously, Lu'E had always wanted to know where her mother had hidden the half Passionless Pill. She had heard her mother mention before that the pill must never be hidden near her, or anyone could kill her and obtain it through a simple search. Lu'E thought to herself that since her mother was disabled and required people to carry her around, the pill couldn't possibly be hidden in some place of extremely great height. Hiding it in the mountain caves or secluded valleys was also out of the

question, so it should be hidden within the manor. But Lu'E had spent the last ten days or so searching the Pill Room, the Sword Room, the garden and the bedrooms, but there was no sign of it anywhere. Presently, the maidservants carried Qiu Qianchi towards the Great Hall, and this came as a big surprise. The Hall was where everyone frequented and it was the hardest place to conceal an object. Furthermore, strong opponents seeking the Passionless Pill were now congregated in the Great Hall itself. Could it be that the Pill had been there all along for anyone's taking?

The metal doors of the Great Hall had been firmly shut and the disciples were guarding it with their knives and fishnets. Upon seeing Qiu Qianchi's arrival, the disciples went forward and saluted. The head disciple bowed and said, "The enemies have not made any move and seem to be helplessly waiting for death."

Qiu Qianchi retorted with a "humph", thinking: "What of a frog in the well, not knowing the vastness of earth and sky. These are no ordinary people who have come with ill intentions. How could they be ones to helplessly wait for death?" Aloud, she commanded, "Open the door!" Two disciples opened the metal door while another eight flanked Qiu Qianchi, guarding her with two fishnets. Together, they moved into the Hall.

Yideng, Huang Rong, Wu Santong and Yelu Qi were all sitting in one corner of the Hall. After Qiu Qianchi's maidservants lowered her chair onto the floor, she said, "All here except Huang Rong and her two daughters are free to leave without hindrance. I will not pursue your crime of intruding into the Valley, so please take your leave immediately."

Huang Rong smiled and said, "Valley-Owner Qiu, a misfortune looms over your head and still you do not know

enough to flee. Instead you come here and exaggerate your importance. It makes one's teeth go cold."

Qiu Qianchi's heart chilled at this, thinking: "How does she know a misfortune looms? Could it be that she knows the old thief has returned?" She said coolly, "Whether it is a blessing or misfortune, retribution will reveal. This old lady is a cripple with handicapped limbs, what else can I be afraid of?"

Of course, Huang Rong knew nothing of Gongsun Zhi's return. But one's countenance speaks everything: she noticed that there was a furrow in Qiu Qianchi's brow and could tell that something weighed heavily on her mind. This was a contrast to the arrogant and ruthless expression she wore when exiting the Hall. Huang Rong conjectured that something must have cropped up in the Valley and so, said a few words to verify. Qiu Qianchi's defensive response told her that she was most probably right.

"Valley-Owner Qiu, your elder brother slipped and fell into the depths of the valley himself, and was definitely not harmed by junior. If you still bear a grudge over this matter then junior will not try to avoid death, but you must first hand over the antidote to cure Yang Guo's poison," said Huang Rong. "If I do die, all my friends here will bear no grudge against you for it and will even help you fend off this pending misfortune and fight the internal enemy. Do you accept this bargain?"

Huang Rong's offer seemed extremely advantageous to Qiu Qianchi, seeing as the latter, being a cripple, could only rely on her powerful date stone skill to inflict any kind of harm. Mentioning the words 'internal enemy' also struck Qiu Qianchi's biggest worry.

Qiu Qianchi thought to herself: "Isn't this too good to be true?" Aloud, she said: "You are Leader of the Beggar Clan, so I assume you will hold true to your words. Should I strike you

with three of my date stones, you will not dodge or use any weapon to deflect them?"

Before Huang Rong could even reply, Guo Fu butted in, "My mother just said she will not avoid it, but she never said she wouldn't use a weapon to deflect it."

Huang Rong smiled and said, "If Valley-Owner Qiu wants to vent her heart's hatred, then junior will certainly not use any weapons to deflect."

"Mother! How can this do?" cried Guo Fu. Her long sword had earlier been broken by the date stone's strike, and she knew its power was incomparable. Her mother was after all made of flesh and blood, how could she survive without avoiding or deflecting?

But Huang Rong thought: "The Guo family owes Guo'er a huge debt. Now that he has contracted this deadly poison, we must obtain the antidote no matter what. Her date stone skill is one of the deadliest projectile arts in the world, if I let her hit me with three stones it is indeed dangerous. Just a slight moment of carelessness will cost me my life, but how would she be willing to hand over the antidote otherwise?"

Huang Rong had chosen her words wisely, making sure that Qiu Qianchi's every need was met. The intention was to lessen her bitterness and worry. In her moment of anxiety they would help her fend off her enemy, and to lessen her bitterness she would be free to injure Huang Rong in the only way she could. Even Qiu Qianchi herself would not be able to think a more advantageous offer than this. But Qiu Qianchi suspected it was too good to be true. She said hoarsely: "You are my mortal enemy, yet here you are, willing to take three date stones from me. What scheme are you hiding? What ill intentions do you have?"

Huang Rong went forward and said in a low voice, "There are many pairs of eyes and ears in this place, most of which harbor ill intentions towards you. I'm going to whisper a few things in your ear."

Qiu Qianchi swept a glance at all the disciples and thought: "Amongst them are many of the old thief's followers. Indeed I should be careful." She nodded.

Huang Rong went near and whispered, "Your enemy will be attacking soon. Isn't junior in a precarious situation as well? Let us quickly bury this hatchet and, no matter if junior lives or dies everyone can fight side-by-side and resist the enemy. Furthermore I am indebted to Yang Guo; I must obtain the Passionless Pill for him even if it costs me my life. If one does not know how to repay kindness, would he be any different to any beast on this earth?" Ending her sentence, she took three steps back and concentrated her gaze on Qiu Qianchi.

At the words 'if one does not know how to repay kindness, would he be different to any beast', Qiu Qianchi gave a start, thinking: "If it wasn't for that fellow Yang Guo who saved me, I'd still be all alone in that underground cave, suffering in silence." But this thought came and went as fast as lightning and her heart hardened once more. She said icily: "Your pretty words do nothing to change my iron heart. Come, come! Take three of my date stones!"

Huang Rong flung her sleeve and said, "Then I'll put my life on the line and take three of your iron date stones." As she spoke she moved backwards, stopping in the middle of the Hall about thirty feet from Qiu Qianchi. "Please fire your date stones!"

Though Wu Santong knew that Huang Rong was always full of wit and ideas, everyone was witness to the power of Qiu Qianchi's date stone skill. Now, seeing Huang Rong standing there barehanded, all their hearts beat anxiously. Guo Fu was

even more worried and walked over to Huang Rong, tugging at her sleeve. "Mother," she whispered. "Let's find a place, I'll give you the Hedgehog Armor so you can put it on, then we don't have to be afraid of that old hag's deadly projectiles."

Huang Rong slid. "What's the point if I use the Hedgehog Armor to block the date stones? Wait and see your mother's method."

At this moment, Qiu Qianchi said: "Everyone else move..." before the word 'aside' left her mouth, a date stone had already been fired at Huang Rong's abdomen. Though it was just a tiny date stone, it sliced through the air so violently that the sound of its speed sounded like a shrill flute. With a high-pitched cry, Huang Rong bent over, clutching her stomach.

Guo Fu, Wu Santong and the others were horrified and before they could go over to help her up, the 'flute' sounded again – the second date stone had been fired, this time at Huang Rong's chest. Again, with a loud cry, Huang Rong swayed and moved unsteadily backwards, looking like she was about to fall.

Qiu Qianchi saw that Huang Rong was indeed true to her word, making no attempt to dodge. The two date stones had already struck the essential points of her body. With that same kind of compelling force, the iron date stones could break even a rock, what more of human flesh? But Huang Rong had sustained two date stones without falling, obviously hanging on despite the pain to receive the third date stone. Secretly astounded, Qiu Qianchi thought to her self: "At first I thought this woman looked too delicate to possess any real substance as Leader of the Beggar Clan. But now it seems like she is indeed a formidable pugilist!"

At the thought of Huang Rong's imminent death after receiving two date stones, she couldn't help but feel pleased.

With a “po” sound, the third date stone left her mouth. This time, it went for Huang Rong’s throat. With the stone penetrating the throat, her brother’s killer would definitely die on the spot.

When Huang Rong said that she would take three hits of her date stones, she had yet to think of any good ideas, knowing that she could only do so in exchange for the Pill. She would then die and repay her debt to Yang Guo. But after having a quiet chat with Qiu Qianchi, she had a notion which invoked many thoughts in her brain, a plan struck her mind. Huang Rong had secretly picked up Guo Fu’s sword. It had been broken earlier by the fired date stones. She had it hidden in her sleeve. When the dates were fired later, she could bend her elbow and use the broken sword’s handle to deflect the stone. But the impact of the date stones and the sword would cause a metallic sound, so she had shouted two times to cover the sounds. This clever move had indeed perfectly prevented Qiu Qianchi from suspecting anything.

Huang Rong had deliberately faked being injured severely as these could both reduce the anger of Qiu Qianchi and save her face for being the master of the valley. The third date stone was aimed to hit her throat, so Huang Rong could not raise her sleeve, and block it with the hidden sword handle. If she did, Qiu Qianchi would then be able to see through the ruse. This would expose her breaking of the covenant of not blocking and not avoiding. In the situation now, she could only accept the risk. She slightly bent both of her elbows, waiting for the date stone to fly to her lips. Her chest had already been filled with 'Zhen Qi', and when she opened her mouth, with all her effort, she pushed the 'Zhen Qi' out of her mouth. It was all because she knew where the date stones would come that caused her to be so flexible. She used her 'Zhen Qi' against Qiu Qianchi's as her's was near but Qiu Qianchi's was far. She could then take great advantage of this situation and reduce the speed of the date stones. One

thing she did not know was, that in the past, Qiu Qianchi had been living in a cave alone. Though her limbs were disabled, she had practiced spitting date stones everyday and all the time not wondering about other things.

Huang Rong, on the other hand, had gong li that was not as deep and profound as Qiu Qianchi's. She still had to take care of the matters of the Beggar Clan, protecting Xiangyang, giving birth to children and teaching her disciples. How could she compare with Qiu Qianchi? Thus, when her 'Zhen Qi' was released, the date stone's speed was only reduced a little, as it was not comparable to the force and power of the flying date stone.

Huang Rong was shocked when she noticed this, but the date stone was already in front of her lips. She had no other ideas and so she opened her mouth and bit at the date stone as hard as possible. The force of the iron date stone shook her teeth terribly and created awful pain in her gums. She was staggered and stepped back two steps. The date stone had really forced her back this time. But, fortunately for her fast thinking in such a short time and the two quick back steps she took, her front teeth were saved or else they would have broken off immediately after the hit. Though they were saved from breaking off, the impact had her gums bleeding.

The people standing around shouted in shock together, and surrounded her. Huang Rong raised her head and spit out the date stone and it stuck in one of the wooden planks of the roof. She frowned and said, "Qiu Valley Master, sister has taken your three date stone hits, my life will not last long. I only hope you will not break your promise and give me the pill." Qiu Qianchi saw that she could even stop her swift flying date stone by biting it, and was a little shocked as well, but she could not understand why the first two date stones did not cause her to fall down though they were shot into her body with great force. She glanced at Gongsun Lu'E, and

thought, 'My daughter has been poisoned by the Passion Flower. Even if he becomes my son-in-law, how could I still give the remaining half Passionless Pill to him..?' But just now she had agreed, in front of everyone, that she would give Huang Rong the pill. She could not deny it. She had a plan suddenly and spoke, "Guo Madam, though both of us are women, we do what we promise, it is always this way. You have voluntarily taken my three date stones; such bravery is very rare now in this world. I admire you very much, and so the pill I will surely give you. If I am in trouble, I do wish everyone here could lend me a helping hand."

Guo Fu really thought her mother had taken the three date stones without trickery, and shouted, "If my mother is injured heavily, everyone here would have already fought with their lives against you." She turned her head towards Huang Rong and said, "Ma...where did the old woman's date stones hit you?"

Huang Rong did not answer her daughter's question, but spoke to Qiu Qianchi instead, "My daughter speaks nonsense. Valley Master need not take it seriously. Sister had always spoken and done what she says and will voluntarily help Valley Master force the enemy to retreat if you could give me the pill." Wu Santong and the others had heard Huang Rong speak with clear and bright voice and plenty of air in her lungs. They were slowly feeling relieved when she didn't seem to be injured at all. Qiu Qianchi had also noticed it too. She was very shocked and confused deep in her heart, and thought, "She has such great martial arts that makes it even more difficult for me to break the promise. I can only lie to her." She nodded and spoke, "I would thank you first then." And turned her head towards her daughter and said, "Come over here Lu'E, I have something to say."

Huang Rong had faced so many people who were cunning and unfaithful in her life. She had already noticed there was

something amiss when Qiu Qianchi's eyes blinked non stop. She knew that Qiu Qianchi would not easily give up the pill, but she could not think of any trickery to use yet. She only heard Qiu Qianchi say, "Go ahead in front of me and flip over the fifth tile." Gongsun Lu'E was both shocked and amazed, 'Could it be that the Passionless Pill is hidden under the tile..?' Once Huang Rong heard what she said, she was astonished and praised her in her heart for being so cautious and clever. "This Passionless Pill is so precious that there are many who wanted to have it. It is really ingenious of her to keep it in such an unthinkable place. The pill kept under the tile must really be the real one. She could not possibly have thought that she could be left in such a situation as now, and keep a fake pill under the tile." If Qiu Qianchi was to order her servants to go any medicine room or pharmacy to get the pill, Huang Rong would have wondered if the pill was the real one or a fake one. But now, when she saw Gongsun Lu'E following her mother's orders to flip the tile over, she had fewer worries.

Gongsun Lu'E counted to the fifth tile and pried it up with the small dagger from her waist. She saw dust and ashes under the tile, which was nothing unusual. Qiu Qianchi then spoke, "The hidden secret under the tile cannot be known by others, Lu'E, come over here."

Huang Rong knew that Qiu Qianchi had some cunning thoughts, deliberately acted as though she was seriously injured. She bent herself down slowly so Qiu Qianchi would suspect nothing about her yet. Then, she tilted her ear slightly towards them, trying to eavesdrop on their words. She gave full attention toward them but to no avail. She could only hear "the Passionless Pill is under the green tile" these seven words. This information was not much of a use, as she already knew that the pill was underneath the tile. Qiu Qianchi's voice gradually softened, and thus she was not able to hear another word. She took a look back at Gongsun

Lu'E but there was only a slight frown on her face. She was also nodding in reply.

Huang Rong was already in a frantic state, as she knew that the situation was aggravating but had no way to deal with it. Suddenly, she heard Reverend Yideng speak, "Rong'er, come over here so I can see your wounds..." Huang Rong turned her head to face Reverend Yideng. Seeing Reverend Yideng sitting in a corner of the room, and realizing he had caring look, she thought, "If he feels my wrist, he will know I was actually not injured." Thus, she walked over and stuck out her hand. Reverend Yideng stretched three fingers and placed them on her wrist, mumbling, "Amitufo (the Buddhist word)...the old granny said... Amitufo...there are two bottles under the tile... Amitufo, Amitufo...in the East side is the real pill...Amitufo...in the West side is the fake pill...tells her daughter to take the fake pill, which is on the west... Amitufo... you take the real pill... Amitufo..."

When Reverend Yideng mumbled the Buddhist words, his voice was bright and clear, but when he told her the hidden information, he lowered his voice into a whisper. Huang Rong had only to hear him say, "the old granny said", these four words, and she immediately understood and knew Reverend Yideng's tremendously powerful internal energy made his eyes and ears much better than a normal human. The Buddhist religion is said to have "eyes that can see heaven", and "ears that can hear heaven". It is said in the Buddhist scripture that people with such skills, could hear six different types of sounds in the world without being confused. This type of saying is over exaggerated and is, of course, not believable. But when someone with deep and profound internal energy, a pure and simple heart, has exceptionally incredible ears, which could hear what a normal human could not. This is not strange but rather to be expected.

Though Qiu Qianchi had whispered to her daughter, Reverend Yideng, who sat a few feet away, could hear every single word clearly. He knew that the pill's ingenuity is linked to Yang Guo's life, and so informed Huang Rong about it. The Buddhist religion had always cared about other people's lives.

Huang Rong waited for Reverend Yideng to finish his Buddhist words, and so asked, "Can my injury be healed?" "Can the date stones shoot all at once?" Every sentence she asked, had just nicely covered up Reverend Yideng's hidden speech, such as "in the East side is the real pill", "in the West side is the fake pill". Qiu Qianchi glanced at both of them for a while, but seeing that Huang Rong had a worried look on her face, asking non-stop about her injuries and Reverend Yideng's continuously repeating "Amitufo", she fell for the trick, not knowing that her treacherous plan was discovered.

After listening to her mother's words, Lu'E nodded, bent down and reached into the soil under the tile and felt. There were indeed two bottles; her heart turned sour and thought secretly, 'Dear Yang Guo dear Yang Guo, today I risk my life to get the real pill for you. Of this bitter effort, you will never know, will you?' Immediately, she touched the East bottle and took it out saying, "Mother, the Passionless Pill is here!" She stretched her hand deep under the tile, and was the only one who knew it was the bottle which contained the real pill. Both Qiu Qianchi and Huang Rong thought that it was the one from the West side.

The physical appearance of the two bottles was the same; the pills in the two bottles looked alike too. If Qiu Qianchi did not stick out her tongue to try the pill herself, she would not be able to tell whether it's real or fake. She saw Gongsun Lu'E take out a bottle and thought, "At first, I was still suspecting that this daughter would steal the pill from me to help her lover, but now she had also gotten the Passionless

Flower's poison. She will now be thinking to save herself." Qiu Qianchi was born to be very cunning, evil, harsh and ungrateful. She would never believe anyone on Earth to be willing to sacrifice their life to save others and so said, "We will do what we promised, and I will give the pill to Guo madam..." Lu'E walked towards Huang Rong with both her hands carrying the bottle.

Huang Rong bowed towards Qiu Qianchi in the traditional way and replied, "Thank you for the sincere offer." But she thought in the other way, 'Now I know where the real pill is, could I not easily steal it..?'

Just as she stretched out her hand to receive the bottle, a man suddenly crashed through the roof, making a big hole. That man dropped down and immediately snatched away the bottle which was in Gongsun Lu'E's hands.

Gongsun Lu'E hollered, "Father!" Huang Rong saw that Gongsun Lu'E's face turned pale all of a sudden, and was very anxious. She couldn't stop from feeling astonished, "The bottle Gongsun Zhi took was obviously the fake one, but why is she so worried..?" At this moment, the main room's door suddenly got blasted off with a huge sound, shaking the whole room and causing every red candle's flame to flicker non-stop. The light in the room glowed brightly, followed by a loud sound. The main door split in two, and the door flew off. A man and three women walked in. The man was Yang Guo; the others were Xiao Longnu, Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang.

Gongsun Lu'E saw Yang Guo coming in, shouted with a lost voice, "Brother Yang....." Running towards him, but she felt it was inappropriate and stopped after two steps. She also restrained the sentence she wanted to say. Huang Rong had been noticing Gongsun Lu'E, and saw her eyes revealing deep love towards Yang Guo when she glanced at him. There was also infinite worry in her eyes.

Huang Rong suddenly realized, “Rong’er, Rong’er. How come you don’t understand the girl’s heart even though you have been a mother for so long? Though her mother ordered her to give me the fake pill, she was totally obsessed with Yang Guo, and the pill she tried to give me was the real one. Gongsun Zhi had snatched away the miracle pill, why would she not worry?”

End of Chapter 31.

Chapter 32 - What is Love

Translation by Xiao_Long_Nu & Frans Soetomo



Yang Guo looked across the ravine at the Heart-Breaking Cliff. In the whitish mist, he could almost see the indistinct figure of a woman in white with a red flower in the hair by one of her temples. The woman seemed to move swiftly as she engaged Gongsun Zhi in an intense battle with the pair of swords in her hands.

When Huang Rong, Yideng, Guo Fu and the other were trapped in the main hall, Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were sitting side by side near the flower bushes, chatting. Not too long afterward, Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang arrived. Xiao Longnu saw that Cheng Ying was warm and elegant; she felt a sense of attraction toward her. Immediately she took Cheng Ying's hand and they talked. At the same time, Lu Wushuang told Yang Guo about the fight between Guo Fu and her, how she made her confused and at a loss for words and how Cheng Ying made her lose her sword and lose the moment. After meeting both Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang again, Yang Guo once again felt a little guilty and sorry that he couldn't repay their love for him. Aware that Lu Wushuang apparently knew that Xiao Longnu was now his wife, she was still comfortable in front of Xiao Longnu. Cheng Ying was talking with Xiao Longnu quietly, he was greatly relieved.

The four of them sat on a rock, Xiao Longnu was talking to Cheng Ying and Yang Guo was chatting with Lu Wushuang. Xiao Longnu and Cheng Ying's characters were quieter, and they had fewer things to talk about. Yang Guo and Lu Wushuang were talking non-stop and cracking many jokes, calling each other names like "Dumb Egg" (Sha Dan) and "Wifey". All of a sudden, Cheng Ying spoke out cutting off their speech, "Yang Da Ge [Big Brother], you have Yang Da Sao [Big Sister-in-law] here, so you'll have to change your words when addressing my cousin..." She was laughing while she was talking.

Yang Guo let out a soft cry, “ah”, and stretched out his hand to cover his mouth. In the mean time, Lu Wushuang suddenly felt embarrassed. Her face reddened immediately. Cheng Ying thought silently, “They were only joking and the words contained no serious meaning. I shouldn’t have said it, and now it has made things uncomfortable...” She immediately spoke, “Yang Da Ge, you’ve got the Passionless Poison in your body, how are you feeling now?” Yang Guo replied, “I’m alright. Auntie Guo is very clever and full of ideas. I believe she can get me the miracle pill. I’m only worried about my wife’s injury...” He was pointing towards Xiao Longnu with one finger.

Both Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang were shocked and asked, “What? Yang Da Sao is also injured? We had no idea.” Xiao Longnu smiled slightly and said, “It’s actually nothing. I used my internal energy to stop the poison from spreading. I have been fine these past few days.” Lu Wushuang replied, “What poison is it? Is it the ‘Passionless Poison’ again?” Xiao Longnu said, “No it isn’t, it is my senior sister’s ‘Soul Freezing Needles’.” Lu Wushuang replied, “Of course it’s that disgusting Li Mochou again. Dumb....Big Brother Yang; didn’t you see her ‘Five Poison Secrets’ book? Though the ‘Soul Freezing Needle’ maybe strong, it isn’t difficult to neutralize.”

Yang Guo just sighed softly. Sorrowfully he said, “The poison has infected her blood stream and her internal organs; it is impossible to neutralize it with any ordinary antidote.” Then he proceeded to tell them how Guo Fu – unintentionally – launched the ‘Soul Freezing Needle’ while his wife was trying to cure herself by reversing her blood flow.

Lu Wushuang angrily struck the stone she was sitting on; she was very angry. “Guo Fu really did not follow in her parents’ footsteps; she is ignorant of the laws of heaven. Cousin, we can’t just sit here doing nothing. I don’t care if her parents are chivalrous heroes of the world, I am not afraid of them.”

"We can't really blame her," Xiao Longnu commented. "The situation was entirely different than when she chopped off Guo'er's arm."

"Yang Da Sao," Cheng Ying stated, "My Shifu said that with a strong internal energy we can momentarily halt the spread of the poison; however, the longer the poison resides in our bodies, the worse the end condition will be. Therefore, we will have to get rid of it as soon as possible."

Xiao Longnu only uttered a "Hmm" sound, but Yang Guo thought, "When the Divine Indian Monk wakes up, whether or not he can neutralize the poison, is really hard to say." He did not want to upset Xiao Longnu, so he did not say what he was thinking, he simply said, "I wonder how Auntie Guo and Reverend Yideng are dealing with that mad monk; we'd better go and take a look."

Immediately they sought the way to the main hall. While they are still dozens of zhangs [a zhang is approximately 10 feet/3 meters] away, they saw a dark shadow flashing upward, whom they recognized as Gongsun Zhi. Then a very loud crashing was heard; Gongsun Zhi was smashing a hole in the hall's rooftop and jumping down.

Yang Guo did not dare follow Gongsun Zhi's way of entering the hall via the rooftop since he was wary of the enemy's nets. He destroyed the stone door with his heavy iron sword instead.

When Gongsun Zhi entered the hall and saw Huang Rong and the other skilled martial artists, he was not afraid. He thought, "If I can't fight them, I can always run away, can't I?" He was about to rush outside when suddenly Yang Guo entered the hall by smashing the door. He was startled. He kicked his feet to the ground and leaped up to get out of the hall the same way he entered. His goal that particular moment was to get the antidote [Passionless Pill] for Li

Mochou. Killing Qiu Qianchi and taking back the Passionless Valley could wait another day.

Just as Gongsun Zhi leaped up, Huang Rong followed with the 'Dog Beating Stick' in her hand; using the 'chan' [entangle] technique she entangled Gongsun Zhi's leg. "Old thief!" Qiu Qianchi shouted, and launched an iron date stone [zao he ding] toward Gongsun Zhi's waist. When he was leaping up vertically he had anticipated this attack, so he swung his saber and knocked the projectile down while maintaining his speed going up. But then his ears heard another sound, the second shot was coming his way. His golden saber was still extended; there was not enough time to pull it back. In the meantime Huang Rong's dog beating stick had already entangled his leg and hit his thigh. He could not let the stone hit his abdomen, so he twisted his body frantically and bent his knees trying to elude it.

To everybody's surprise, Qiu Qianchi launched the stone in a very extraordinary way. Everybody could see that those two date stones were directed at Gongsun Zhi. Who would have thought that about half a foot away from Gongsun Zhi, the second date stone suddenly changed course, made a small circle in the air, and ... flew toward Huang Rong! Not even in her wildest dreams could Huang Rong have predicted what had happened. Frantically she moved her dog-beating stick and tried to knock the nail down, but the force carried by that iron date stone nail was too great; Huang Rong's body shook, her arm and hand hurt. With a 'clank' sound the dog-beating stick fell onto the ground and Huang Rong followed after it.

Because of the interruption, Gongsun Zhi was also forced to come back down. He landed next to Huang Rong and immediately swung his saber horizontally toward her. Yang Guo swung his black sword and a strong gust of wind attacked Gongsun Zhi. Yang Guo's attack was so fierce that

Gongsun Zhi's saber was pushed back about three feet. Gongsun Zhi felt the force carried by that sword was earth shattering, in his heart he was frightened no end that Yang Guo - who had lost one arm - had made a tremendous improvement in just one short month.

At that time Lu'E was standing in between her father and mother. She used to be afraid of her father, not daring to speak even half a word; but ever since she overheard her father and Li Mochou's conversation at Broken Heart Cliff, that her father would rather sacrifice his own daughter's life for some woman he barely knew, she experienced a change of heart. She challenged her father, "Father, you crippled Mother's limbs and threw her down into an underground cave. Such viciousness was indeed very rare. Tonight at the Broken Heart Cliff, you discussed something with Li Mochou. May your daughter know what is it about?"

Gongsun Zhi's heart turned cold, he was not aware, that in that secluded place, somebody would have heard their conversation. Even though he was cruel he was still deeply embarrassed, considering his evil plan to harm his own daughter. Now that his daughter confronted him publicly his face paled, "Wh...What? I didn't say anything ..." he stammered.

Lu'E wryly said, "You mean to kill your own daughter for the sake of a woman who is a stranger to our family. I am your daughter. If you want me dead, I certainly would not rebel against you. But Mother has promised to give the Passionless Pill in your hand to somebody else. Please, give that pill back to me." She moved two steps forward and held her hand out to him.

Gongsun Zhi hastily put the porcelain bottle inside his pocket and with a cold laugh said, "One of you betrayed her own husband, while the other rebelled against her father.

Both are wicked. I don't want to deal with you just now. Wait for my revenge." Brandishing his sword and saber so that they made a buzzing sound, he walked out the hall with big strides.

After listening to Lu'E, although Yang Guo did not understand the whole story, he lifted his black sword blocking Gongsun Zhi's way. He turned his head toward Lu'E and asked, "Miss Gongsun, I would like to ask you a question."

Hearing his voice Gongsun Lu'E was overwhelmed with self-pity, she thought, "I would sacrifice my life to give you the antidote, yet I can't let you know that. Several years from now your house will be full of your children and grandchildren and you will soon forget this ill-fated wretched woman. Why would I cause you a life-long regret over this matter?" She lowered her head and asked, "Brother Yang, I am waiting for your question."

"You said your father wants to harm you for a stranger, who is that woman? And would you enlighten me on what happened?" Yang Guo asked.

"That woman was Li Mochou. What happened was ..." She hesitated a little bit, and then said, "Even though my father means me harm, he is still my father. I do not want to tell ... "

"Lu'E, speak up! Tell us!" growled her mother. "He had the courage to do evil, why would you be afraid to unmask him?"

The young lady just shook her head and said with a sad voice, "Brother Yang, half of the pill is inside the bottle in Father's hand. I ... I am an unfilial daughter." Speaking to this point she could not contain herself anymore, "Ma!" she called, as she ran toward her mother and hid her face in her bosom.

When she said 'I am an unfilial daughter' Qiu Qianchi thought she was referring to defying her father, but actually she meant she was defying her mother's instructions. The hall was full of people, but Huang Rong was the only one understood her true meaning.

Since they were surrounded by the enemy Gongsun Zhi had tried to find a way to escape, "Luckily in this critical moment that crazy old hag wounded Madame Guo with her date stone; while they are trying to harm each other, I will have an opportunity to get out of here," he thought. Laughing hard he shouted, "Good! My sweet child! You and your mother just stay on your guard over there. Let us destroy these scoundrels who dare to enter our Passionless Valley." Brandishing his sword and saber he attacked Huang Rong.

Huang Rong's right arm was still hurting; she could not hold the dog-beating stick yet, so she had no choice but to lean sideways to avoid the attack. Guo Fu lifted the sword in her hand trying to protect her mother. Gongsun Zhi's black sword thrust toward Guo Fu's throat; Guo Fu parried with her sword. "Watch out!" cried Huang Rong. With a 'clang' sound the girl's sword was cut in two. Gongsun Zhi's sword kept going! Guo Fu froze! Her heart was almost jumping out of her throat; she was incapable of doing anything.

"Fend off with your right arm!" cried Lu Wushuang from the side.

In that crucial moment, as the black sword almost pierced her throat, Guo Fu raised her right arm without thinking ...

Everybody eyes were wide open. Suddenly Cheng Ying's voice was heard, "Cousin! How could you ..." Miss Cheng knew that her cousin said that because she held a grudge against Guo Fu who chopped off Yang Guo's right arm. Cheng Ying was also extremely grieved that Yang Guo lost his arm; she had cried her heart out silently and of course she also

hated Guo Fu for acting so rashly. But she realized it was an unfortunate accident; she definitely had never thought of chopping off her arm to retaliate. Therefore, hearing Lu Wushuang, she moved forward trying to block, but that black sword had already pierced Miss Guo's right arm.

"Rrrrrrip!" Guo Fu's clothes were slashed open and she staggered backward; but strangely her arm was unharmed, showing not even a drop of blood. Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang were startled. Gongsun Zi and Qiu Qianchi were shocked. Stabilizing herself Guo Fu exclaimed, "Thank you Big Sister! How did you know ..." Miss Guo was not the smartest kid in the world and she thanked Lu Wushuang for "saving" her life.

Yang Guo quickly interrupted her, "This old scoundrel, Gongsun Zhi, does not know your special skill." He knew Huang Rong had soft-hedgehog armor, which was not penetrable by even the sharpest sword or saber. When Guo Fu's arm was not even scratched, she immediately realized it was because of the soft-hedgehog armor; thus she was asking, "How did you know ..." she was going to say, "...that I'm wearing the soft-hedgehog armor?" Yang Guo thought it was fortunate that Gongsun Zhi's sharp sword was not able to injure her and that shocked Gongsun Zhi, but it wouldn't serve any good purpose for him to know the whole story. Yang Guo said, "This lady is the daughter of Great Hero Guo and Clan Leader Huang, the granddaughter of the Peach Blossom Island Master Huang Yaoshi; she inherited a very special skill which makes her body impenetrable by any weapon. How could your rusty sword hurt her?"

"Hmm! I was being lenient with her. Do you think I could not take her life?" Gongsun Zhi mockingly swung his sword back and forth, making a buzzing noise.

Guo Fu was furious by his condescending remark. "He would not be able to hurt me because of this protective vest. If I attack fiercely, I will gain the upper hand," she thought, and then said, "Brother Xiuwen, let me lend your sword. This devious old man does not believe in Peach Blossom Island's superior martial arts. Let me introduce them to him."

Xiuwen gave his sword to the young lady, who then brandished it and shouted arrogantly, "Devious old man Gongsun! Let's fight again!"

Just by seeing her move Gongsun Zhi could see her meager abilities. "Alright, please give me a lesson or two!" He snarled and hacked with his saber. Guo Fu leaned sideways eluding that attack and thrust her sword at the same time. She was shocked to see the black sword in front of her face. "Not good!" Guo Fu said in her heart, "I have the soft-hedgehog armor on me, but this sword does not have any protection, if hit by his sword, it would certainly be cut in two." Therefore, she held her thrust and jumped backward. Gongsun Zhi then moved his two weapons to his right hand, while his bare left hand attacked her. Guo Fu was thrilled, "Go ahead and hit my soft-hedgehog armor and injure yourself," she thought. But she also realized that if she took the full force of his hand head on, her internal organs would be injured as well. She then slanted her body slightly to neutralize 70% of his force and waited for his hand to hit her. Surprisingly, Gongsun Zhi leaped backward just before touching her clothes and cried, "Good little girl! You attack me stealthily!" He staggered and almost fell down.

Guo Fu was bewildered, "I didn't attack you stealthily!" but then she thought, "Could it be that the soft-hedgehog armor is so incredible that he is injured even before touching it?"

How would she know Gongsun Zhi was just pretending? His goal was achieved, he had the pill and now he just wanted to

dart out and give the pill to Li Mochou. He did not have any time to vie for supremacy with a little kid like Guo Fu. He realized that among these intruders: Yang Guo and Huang Rong were the strongest and that long eyebrowed monk, who was sitting meditating quietly, certainly was not an easy rival. He wanted to use the opportunity, while everybody thought Guo Fu was winning, to sneak out through the back door.

Lu'E, however, had kept her eyes on her father. She immediately made her move. "Father, hold on!" At that moment two date stones flew, Qiu Qianchi was afraid she might injure her daughter, so she aimed toward Gongsun Zhi's head. He quickly ducked and the stones barely missed Lu'E's temple before they hit the wall.

"Get out of the way!" he barked, and lunged toward his daughter.

The young woman held her ground and said, "Give me back the pill ..." But before she could finish, her hand was grabbed and she was held in front of his chest as a shield. He snapped, "Wicked woman! If you want me to die, then let the two of us die together." By that time Qiu Qianchi had already launched two more stones. She was shocked, but fortunately managed to move her head a little so that the stones flew and missed Lu'E's body.

What she did not anticipate was that the stones hit two of the valley disciples. One was hit on the head, the other on the chest. They died instantly. Gongsun Zhi was delighted with this turn of events. In his effort to take the valley back, he would need not only Li Mochou's help, but his disciples' as well.

Without wasting a single moment he shouted, "You wicked woman! You dare to kill my disciples! I will hold you responsible!" But because of this incident, he was held back

and Yang Guo already stood in front of him. “Mr. Gongsun... not so fast, we need to talk about these many problems first.”

Gongsun Zhi; still holding Lu'E high above his head, smirked, “You dare to block me?” With his left foot as an axis he made one turn, then, with his right foot, he made another one. With these two turns he had moved within four feet of Yang Guo. Yang Guo was afraid that Lu'E would be hurt, so he leaped sideways.

Gongsun Lu'E was held in her father's hands immobilized; when Gongsun Zhi made the circles, she could see that Yang Guo leaped back to avoid hurting her; she was deeply touched and her heart was greatly consoled, “He did not try to get the pill for my sake. I can die peacefully.” She could not move her limbs, but she could turn her head. A moment later she closed her eyes and sighed, “Yang Lang, Yang Lang! [Translator note: “Lang” could also mean “Dear Husband” – Lu'E regarded Yang Guo as her husband.]” She then stretched her beautiful neck toward her father's black sword!

“Aiyo!” Yang Guo called out and rushed forward, trying to help, but he was too late! He stood still like he was in a daze. Two streams of tears flowed down his cheeks. A lovely young woman with a heart as big as the sky, had lost her life at her own father's hand.

Gongsun Zhi was also startled, his heart turn sour, but his ears heard loud and angry scream from across the hall. Suddenly three more iron date stones flew like a flash. Gongsun Zhi threw his daughter's body to intercept them. Three date stones pierced her lifeless body. Everybody screamed and shouted angrily at his viciousness; after Lu'E died he still had the heartlessness to mutilate her body. They unsheathed their weapons and surrounded him.

“My disciples!” cried Gongsun Zhi, “By forming an alliance with these intruders this wicked woman planned to

annihilate everybody in this valley! Come! Let us capture them with the net formation!”

Since they were young, these disciples had always regarded Gongsun Zhi as their benevolent leader. When this cruel man was wounded and driven out of the valley, they had to follow Qiu Qianchi, albeit unwillingly. Now they heard his commanding tone, and, having witnessed earlier the death of two of their own by the old woman’s stones, without thinking they lifted the nets and started to surround the enemy from every direction.

Each net was about twenty feet square, full of sharp blades. The people in the hall were not weak in terms of martial arts, yet they did not know how to deal with this net formation. If the nets ever caught them, their body would have at least ten additional holes in it. The nets were getting closer to them, including Qiu Qianchi who loudly shouted, “My disciples, don’t listen to that old scoundrel’s nonsense; everybody listen to me! Back off!” But the disciples turned a deaf ear on her; they followed Gongsun Zhi’s command obediently.

“‘Kun wang’ [earth net], move to the front, ‘kan wang’ [pit net], diagonally to the left, ‘zhen wang’ [shock net], turn to the right!” Quickly those nets moved to those positions making the circle smaller and smaller.

Huang Rong took some steel needles from her pocket and raised her hand to shoot at the eight green clothed disciples on the west. The distance was close, the steel needles were numerous, at least five or six disciples would be injured, she thought. But they lifted the net up and with “ding, ding” sound all the needles, as well as Qiu Qianchi’s stones were stuck to the nets. “Not good!” cried Huang Rong, “Fu’er, lift your sword, protect your head! Hack those nets down!”

Heeding her mother's instruction, Guo Fu jumped to the northeast. Four valley disciples moved to block her. She managed to parry several blades; either with her sword or her protective vest, but those four disciples spread out and tried to capture her just like fishermen catching fish.

Since Yang Guo was standing close to Gongsun Zhi, he was actually outside the net formation. But then eight valley disciple turned to the left and move to the right surrounding him. Yang Guo realized the situation was critical he leaped toward Guo Fu, exerted his internal energy to his heavy sword and hacked down the net. It broke with a loud noise, and its bearers -four disciples, fell down to the floor. Wu Santong and Yelu Qi immediately pounced and beat them to near death. Yang Guo hacked twice and two more net formations went down. With three hacks he destroyed three nets. If we consider the net material, we should know that they are very tough and ductile. The fact that Yang Guo was able to tear them down demonstrated his magnificent internal energy and his amazing black steel heavy sword. The valley disciples were shocked! They scrambled away in fear.

"Five nets...Attack!" again Gongsun Zhi shouted his command, "This kid has lost his strength."

Yang Guo was nervous. He wasn't sure he could hack five nets down at once. He quickly made his move before the enemy did. With one more hack, another net went down. Just as Yang Guo was about to make another move, a loud voice was heard outside, "Where'd you go?"

He was startled. A moment later a yellow shadow darted inside. Everybody was surprised to see it was none other than the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' Li Mochou, who upon entering the hall, stood arrogantly wielding her sword.

Before anybody could react, another shadow darted inside whose body was covered with blood and whose hair was in disarray. It was Zhu Ziliu! He pounced on Li Mochou with his bare hands, left finger and right palm; and even though she was armed, she ran around trying to elude his attack. It was because he attacked as a mad man, without any regard to his own safety. They were both martial arts experts, and in a flash they had already run around the hall six or seven times.

Yang Guo was confused, “Li Mochou is not inferior to Zhu Ziliu; how could she be afraid like that? What about the Divine Indian Monk?” Those two actually possessed almost the same level of martial skills, but in term of lightness kungfu, Li Mochou was a step superior. Therefore, Zhu Ziliu was not able to catch up, plus he was bleeding profusely.

Wu Santong, Dunru and Xiuwen leaped together to block the demoness. “Martial Brother!” cried Zhu Ziliu. “That wicked woman has killed Martial Uncle! Your younger brother ... I ...”... he couldn’t finish, his body swayed and he fell to the floor.

That was indeed a heavy blow to everyone present. Reverend Yideng had a very high level of spiritual strength, not to mention his profound internal energy, he was a very composed monk. But this news made him stand up and he cried, “Ah!” To Yang Guo, the news was more like thunderbolt from a bright and clear sky. He almost blacked-out. He then cast a glance toward his wife, who at that very same moment was looking at him. Two pairs of eyes met. They felt like they were falling down a very dark and cold hole in the ground. Xiao Longnu uttered a soft cry and rushed toward her husband, and leaned her body against his, breathing heavily.

After a while Yang Guo composed himself, threw his heavy sword away, and walked listlessly outside, holding his wife’s hand.

What had happened? How did the Indian Monk fall victim to the demoness? In his effort to cure poison induced illness, the Divine Indian Monk had tested many-many types of poison on his own body. Quite naturally, his body developed immunity to poisons. When pricking himself with the Passionless Flower thorns, he predicted that he would be unconscious for three whole days and nights. It turned out that he had regained his consciousness on the second night. As he opened his eyes he said, "Ziliu, this Passionless Flower is not as lethal as I thought it would be. I am confident that I can neutralize it."

Ziliu was ecstatic and immediately told his Martial Uncle that Reverend Yideng, Yang Guo, and the others had arrived in the valley. He also mentioned that it was Yang Guo himself who smashed the kiln door where they were being kept prisoner.

"The sooner we can neutralize the poison, the better. Let's not waste another second," having said that the Indian Monk immediately walked outside and headed directly to the flower bushes. He looked down and started searching for the herbs he thought would be the antidote to the poison. It is a natural phenomenon that the poison and the antidote would usually co-exist in the same place.

Unbeknownst to them, Li Mochou was still hiding behind the rocks scattered throughout that area. Seeing the Monk, she launched her "Soul Freezing Needle" at him. The Indian Monk did not possess any martial arts skill so when the needle hit him in the chest, he died instantly.

Hearing the unusual noise, Zhu Ziliu knew something was amiss. He saw Li Mochou and immediately rushed toward his Martial Uncle without regard to his own safety. Li Mochou launched another needle his way. Since Ziliu was not armed, he used his long sleeve to parry the attack but left his back

defenseless at the same time. The demoness slashed with her sword and made an inch-deep wound on his right shoulder.

He quickly exerted his internal energy to his fingertip and attacked the demoness' waist. He knew if he backed off, the demoness would not let him off easily. Ziliu was starting to get anxious because he did not hear anything from his Martial Uncle's direction, while the 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' attacked him relentlessly. "Uncle... Uncle!" he called, but the Monk did not respond.

The demoness sneered, "If you want his answer, you will have to meet him ... in hell!" Li Mochou expected him to lose his concentration. In battle between experts, the outcome is more often that not decided by who lost one's concentration first. Who knew that Ziliu not only did not lose his, but became fiercer, like he was possessed ...

Under the starry sky Li Mochou could see his unusually bright eyes as he attacked her like there is no tomorrow. The place where they were was so quiet, nobody was around, no sound was heard; but perhaps remembering her own sins, she became nervous and started to feel afraid. Because of that, she increased her attacks, which forced Ziliu to back off a bit, and using the opportunity, she leaped back and ran away. Ziliu immediately checked his Uncle's wrist and did not find any pulse. The Indian Monk was beyond help. With extreme grief and anger he leaped toward the demoness and started chasing her.

Gongsun Zhi was ecstatic when he saw Li Mochou. "Sister Li! Over here!" he started toward her.

Even though she was injured, Huang Rong did not lose her wit. She saw Gongsun Zhi acting weird and immediately knew what he was up to. "Guo'er!" she cried, "Don't let those two get close to each other!"

Yang Guo ignored her, he just smiled bitterly. The death of the Indian Monk had broken his heart, and he no longer cared who would get the half-pill.

Yelu Qi saw all this, and he made a swift decision. He picked one end of a net. The one destroyed by the heavy sword. "Wu Brothers!" he shouted, "Help me hold the other end!" Wu Dunru, Wanyan Ping and Yelu Yan quickly complied, and together they moved and blocked Gongsun Zhi who was trying to approach Li Mochou.

The overall situation was very chaotic. Qiu Qianchi used that opportunity to repeatedly launch her stones. Five or six Passionless Valley disciples fell down, dead. The net formation was completely destroyed and Gongsun Zhi's minions scrambled out.

Angrily Gongsun Zhi hacked Yelu Yan with his golden saber. Cheng Ying jumped in and attacked the enemy's hand with her flute. Gongsun Zhi quickly retracted his saber and thrust his black sword toward Cheng Ying. Seeing her cousin in danger, Lu Wushuang quickly came to her rescue and hacked repeatedly with her willow-leaf saber.

Because of this hindrance, Gongsun Zhi's intention to ally himself with Li Mochou was foiled. He could not give her the pill. Moreover, Qiu Qianchi kept launching her stones toward him. After a few stances he started to get nervous and decided to get out as quickly as he could, and join Li Mochou later. "Sister Li!" he shouted, "Let's get out of here! I'll meet you at you-know-where." As soon as opportunity arrived, they ran past Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu who at the time were still holding hands, walking slowly out of the hall. They seemed oblivious to what happened around them.

"Sister Long, block Gongsun Zhi!" Huang Rong called, "The Passionless Pill is in his hand."

Xiao Longnu was startled, "After the Divine Monk's death, Guo'er's life depends on the pill," she thought. She let go Yang Guo's hand and chased him.

"Long'er, let him go!" Yang Guo called out.

"Why?" she asked, but did not stop. Yang Guo was forced to follow. Gongsun Zhi and Li Mochou took their own separate ways; one ran to northeast, the other to northwest. Xiao Longnu, Yang Guo, Cheng Ying and Wushuang ran after Gongsun Zhi; while Wu Santong, his two sons, Zhu Ziliu and Wanyan Ping followed Li Mochou. Yelu Qi, his sister and Guo Fu kept Reverend Yideng and Huang Rong company, while guarding against Qiu Qianchi's actions.

In the Wu Santong's party, Zhu Ziliu had the highest martial art skill but he had already suffered heavy injuries, so he gave up after running a little while. Wu Santong and his sons stopped to check on his condition, which caused them to lose track of the demoness.

"If that wicked woman could elude us, we really do not have any face to see Martial Uncle," sighed Zhu Ziliu bitterly. They tried beating the bushes and other places, but Li Mochou had vanished from sight. "Gongsun Zhi has already arranged a meeting place for them," mused Zhu Ziliu again, "We don't know where it would be, but if we just follow Gongsun Zhi, we'll eventually find her. He needs to give that pill to her anyway."

"You are right," Wu Santong said, "Let's find Gongsun Zhi." So, utilizing their lightness kungfu they changed course to northwest.

Sure enough, not too long after they heard battle sounds. They quickened their pace, but the noise they heard was kind of peculiar; sometimes seemed like it was just around the corner, other times it came from afar. They kept going in

circles until the dawn broke, but never found the source of the noise. At daybreak they arrived on a path sloping upward. Suddenly they heard a loud and hair-raising laugh. They stopped and lifted their gaze upward. There, across a ravine, perched on a hill, stood a man laughing maniacally. It was Gongsun Zhi. There was a deep ravine below him, and a very high mountain peak above.

Seeing Gongsun Zhi's madness – real or pretend, Zhu Ziliu was worried, "If he slips, his body will be totally smashed in the abyss below. His death is well-deserved, but he would take the Passionless Pill down with him." He quickly ran ahead and after making a turn he found Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu, Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang standing on the verge of the ravine looking up at Gongsun Zhi.

Xiao Longnu approached Zhu Ziliu and softly asked, "Uncle Zhu, can you think of something to force him down?" Zhu Ziliu looked around and found out that between the mountain peak and the place where they stood there was a natural long rock bridge that looked like a tree log, only less than one foot wide. The rock bridge, as well as the stones around the bridge, were covered with moss, which make them slippery. There was no way they could force him down. He had to be tricked into coming down on his own. But Gongsun Zhi was so shrewd. What kind of trick could they use?

Wu Santong remembered his indebtedness for Yang Guo's great kindness. The fact that his two sons were alive and live in harmony with each other was because of Yang Guo's sacrifice. He decided right then and there to repay this debt and, rolling his sleeves up, immediately said, "Let me drag him down here." But before he could move a shadow flashed ahead of him. It was Cheng Ying. "Let me do it!" And she already stepped onto the rock. She was quick, Yang Guo was even quicker. She felt somebody tug her sleeve and she was

pulled back. "Little Sister, how much am I worth that you make a sacrifice like that?" she heard Yang Guo whisper into her ear. She blushed and was speechless.

Suddenly Xiao Longnu's voice was heard, "Let me borrow your swords." With a fluid motion she pulled Dunru's and Wanyan Ping's swords. Such a beautiful move! Before they even realized what had happened, the young woman was already perched on the rock.

Gongsun Zhi was shocked to see her bravery; he quickly jumped back to the other end of the bridge. Wielding his sword in front of him he snickered, "Do you really want to die?"

Holding her two swords, Xiao Longnu quietly prayed, "Please God, bless me. Let me die after I get the pill back." She looked at Gongsun Zhi and softly spoke, "Mr. Gongsun, you have saved my life, yet because of me, you have suffered a lot of misery. I ... my heart ached for you. I do not want to fight you."

"So, what do you want?" he asked.

"I want to beg you to give me the Passionless Pill to save my husband's life," she answered, "I know you have no use for the pill, but I will forever be indebted to you if you just give it to me."

While they were still speaking, Yang Guo shouted, "Long'er! Get back here! What's that half-pill for? It won't save both our lives."

Looking at her standing atop the rock, her dress fluttered in the wind, and her stunningly beautiful countenance, Gongsun Zhi was mesmerized; how could Li Mochou be compared to her? Suddenly an evil thought came to his mind. "That kid is your husband?" he asked.

“Yes, we are married.”

“Well, if you grant me a request, I will immediately give this pill to you,” Gongsun Zhi continued.

By the look of his eyes, Xiao Longnu knew what he was about to say. She shook her head and said, “I am already married, I can’t marry you. Mr. Gongsun, I know you loved me very much. However, I have already given my heart to someone else. With a deep regret I cannot accept your love.”

Gongsun Zhi’s countenance changed. “Go away!” he barked, “If not, I won’t hold myself back any longer.”

“If we fight, wouldn’t that be very sad?” Xiao Longnu said sadly. She was not pretending, she really was remembering Gongsun Zhi’s kindness.

Gongsun Zhi made an “hmp” sound and put a really evil smile on his lips. “I want to see that Yang Guo kid screaming and rolling around on the ground dying miserably,” he said, “I want to see a faithful wife wearing mourning clothes.”

“Long’er! Come back!” Yang Guo kept shouting, “Come back! Don’t waste your breath talking to that lowly creature.” He would have come and dragged his wife away if he could find a place to put his feet down.

The young madam smiled sadly. “Listen!” she said, “He’s calling me. He called because he loves me. He’d rather die of the poison than see me hurt by you.”

Gongsun Zhi’s mind was reeling. He wanted very much to make Xiao Longnu his hostage. However, they would both fall into the ravine below if the young wife put up any struggle at all. On the other hand, if he did not capture her, how could he save his own life? He looked at his enemies, and among them, Yang Guo was the only one he was afraid of. But he was relieved to see the young man did not wield his heavy

sword. In his mind, unarmed, Yang Guo would not be able to block him. His best bet right now would be to attack Xiao Longnu, try to capture her, or at least push her back far enough for him to escape. Having thought this over, he barked, "Will you or won't you move back?" and thrust his sword simultaneously. Xiao Longnu's left sword parried this attack while her right sword counterattacked. A series of metallic sounds echoed throughout the valley.

After learning the 'Mutual Hands Combat' technique from Zhou Botong, Xiao Longnu's swords skills were more than doubled. Even though she was poisoned and her level of energy was weakened somewhat, Gongsun Zhi's black-sword and golden-saber technique still was no match for her 'Jade Maiden Swords Technique'. His technique, though carrying seemingly infinite variations, still resulted in a saber remaining a saber, and a sword always a sword. She moved her pair of swords so fast, that her body was surrounded by the flashing of the swords. Gongsun Zhi felt like he was caught in a rainstorm. Swords everywhere ... He sighed and regretted his decision, "I wouldn't have attacked her in the first place if I had known her true skill." Luckily for him, the "Jade Maiden Swords" was not created with murderous intent, plus Xiao Longnu did not have any intentions to kill him; therefore, he was able to hold his ground for the time being.

In the meantime, Reverend Yideng, Huang Rong, Guo Fu, Yelu Qi and Yelu Yan had also arrived. Together they witnessed this spectacular battle with their hearts pounding.

"Eh, you go help her," Guo Fu told Yelu Qi, "Elder Sister Long can't win by herself."

Yelu Qi only shook his head, "There is no place I can set my foot on."

In spite of her weaknesses and spoiled nature, Guo Fu's natural character was not evil. She became stressed when she saw Xiao Longnu's dire situation and remembered her own experience battling the old man's high martial arts skills. Yelu Qi was not wrong. But Guo Fu insisted, this time to her mother, "Mother! Please help Sister Long." She did not realize that even without her prompting everybody was willing to help. Everyone was just as anxious as she was, and of course they would've helped if it were at all possible.

They saw Gongsun Zhi's golden saber and black sword repeatedly making some killer moves, while Xiao Longnu's double-swords moved gracefully, seemingly without any strength. It gave the impression that she was losing to Gongsun Zhi's vicious attacks. Only Yideng, Yang Guo, Huang Rong and Zhu Ziliu knew Xiao Longnu was actually gaining the upper hand. However, they were fighting ferociously on a slippery cliff; if they lost their footing they would surely fall to their deaths. Therefore, each move carried a life or death risk. They saw two shadows dancing around; one surrounded by a golden aura, the other wrapped by a black one. Everybody held their breath, with cold sweat on their palms and foreheads.

After observing for some time, Huang Rong noticed that Xiao Longnu was utilizing the 'Mutual Hands Combat' technique, which as far as she knew, was mastered only by Zhou Botong and her own husband, Guo Jing. She then concluded that Madame Yang had received the Old Urchin's tutelage. Yet more time passed. She witnessed Gongsun Zhi's high level of martial arts and Xiao Longnu's disadvantage because of the poison in her body. Her swordsmanship was a level higher than Gongsun Zhi's, however; she was not able to gain an upper hand even after hundreds of stances.

Huang Rong's intelligent mind started to cook something up. "Guo'er," she said, "let's help Sister Long. We create a

disruption for that disgusting man. You disparage him, while I encourage him. He'll lose his concentration."

Yang Guo was delighted and silently praised his smart Auntie Guo.

"Mr. Gongsun, I have killed Qiu Qianchi!" shouted Huang Rong.

Gongsun Zhi heard that, his heart was shaken, half believing, half doubting.

"Gongsun Zhi!" cried Yang Guo, "Li Mochou said that she would beat you to death if you don't give her the pill!"

"No, no!" Huang Rong countered, "Li Mochou did say that she would marry you as soon as you cure her."

"Well, yes! But we won't allow that to happen," Yang Guo continued, "We will capture you and throw you to the Passionless Flower field, so that you too will enjoy the thorns' exotic sensation."

"No, don't be so cruel," said Huang Rong. "Mr. Gongsun, don't you worry. Let's forget this enmity. I want to be your friend."

"How could you befriend this scoundrel!" howled Yang Guo. "Gongsun Zhi. I've heard that you killed your maidservant, Rou'er. I think she has become a ghost and wants revenge. Ah! Look! Behind you! Watch out! The ghost is going to attack!"

This ramble between Yang Guo and Huang Rong had shown some results. Of course Xiao Longnu also heard them, but it has nothing to do with her, and by nature – and her upbringing in the Ancient Tomb – she was always very composed. She had also learned to divide her own mind. She started to gain an upper hand. Gongsun Zhi had been busy

eluding left and right, his situation got precarious; this exchange between Huang Rong and Yang Guo made him nervous. He shouted, "What nonsense are you talking about? Shut up!"

"Hey, Gongsun Zhi!" shouted Yang Guo, "Who's that behind you? Eek! It's a young woman, her hair disheveled, her tongue stick-out, her face full of blood! Ah! She comes near you ... She ... is going to choke you!" Suddenly, he yelled with a loud voice, "Yes! Rou'er! Strangle Gongsun Zhi!"

Gongsun Zhi knew they were just trying to break his concentration. Nevertheless, he remembered his many crimes, and without even realizing it, he looked back. At that very same moment Xiao Longnu's sword flashed diagonally, the point of the sword vibrated and stabbed his left wrist. His saber fell from his grip. Under beautiful rays of dawn that golden saber glittered down into the ravine. It was some time later that a very distant splash was heard, like there was water at the bottom. Wu Santong, Zhu Ziliu and the others looked at each other with amazement; the time it took for the saber to fall indicated that the ravine was very, very deep!

Losing his saber, Gongsun Zhi could not defend himself much longer, let alone make any attacks. To him Xiao Longnu's left sword and right sword seemed like four swords. Not long afterward, she managed to disarm him of his black sword as well. With the right sword pointing toward his chest, the left toward his stomach she plainly said, "Mr. Gongsun, just give me the pill. I won't kill you."

The old man was pale. "What about the others?" he asked.

"They won't hurt you," she gave her promise.

He had no choice; he did not want to die, why would he care about Li Mochou anyway? So he took the bottle from his pocket and handed it to her. Still pointing her left sword at

his abdomen, Xiao Longnu took the bottle with mixed emotions. "I won't live much longer, but Guo'er's life is spared," she said in her heart. Then she leaped back from the rock bridge.

Wu Santong, Zhu Ziliu and the others were not unaware of this young madam's level of martial arts; however, even in their wildest dreams they could not believe Xiao Longnu was able to use two different sword stances at the same time. Of course they heard such skill existed. It was told that in the Jianghu world, only Zhou Botong and Guo Jing have mastered the skill. But ... nobody had ever seen it, therefore they were rather skeptical about it. Now they have seen it with their own eyes and knew what they heard was true. Yelu brother and sister, Wu brothers, Cheng Ying, Lu Wushuang and Guo Fu of the younger generation saw that Xiao Longnu's age was not much different than theirs, yet her martial arts were incredibly higher than theirs; they could not help but admired her as their senior.

As she landed on the ground, her clothes fluttered in the wind, and she walked gracefully toward Yang Guo. She looked like a deity, an angel descending from above. Without prompting everybody cheered!

Yang Guo rushed forward, while the others also crowded around them. Xiao Longnu opened the bottle and took the half pill out. "Guo'er," she said, laughing softly, "I think this is the real thing."

"Real?" Yang Guo was indifferent. "Long'er, how are you feeling? Why is your face pale? Try concentrating your breathing."

His wife laughed emotionlessly. She had started to feel uneasiness and heaviness because of blocked energy in her chest as soon as she finished her battle with Gongsun Zhi. She had tried circulating her 'qi', but failed. She was dizzy

and was about to throw up. She understood very well that this was the symptom of the poison getting worse. She just did not care anymore because she had the Passionless Pill in her hand. To her, Yang Guo's life was a lot more precious than her own; so she just smiled and did not respond.

Yang Guo held his wife's hand and was shocked to find it colder than ice. "Long'er!" he said, his heart thumping heavily. "How ... what do you feel?"

"I'm OK. Just swallow this pill," she answered calmly.

Yang Guo looked at his wife's face with wide eyes. "No, I don't want it," he said. His voice trembled. "Half a Passionless Pill will not save both our lives. Long'er ... ah, Long'er! Do you think if you died I would want to live alone?" Suddenly he took away the half-pill from his wife's hand and ... threw it down into the 'bottomless' gorge. That half-pill – the only thing in the whole wide world that can save his life – flew down into the abyss.

What had happened was beyond everybody's expectations, they gasped in shock! Xiao Longnu could feel his deep and profound love toward her, she was sad yet grateful. She was no longer able to maintain her consciousness and fainted in her husband's arm.

Guo Fu, Wu Brothers, Wanyan Ping and Yelu Yan were baffled since they did not know the whole story; they all talked at the same time among themselves. Suddenly Wu Santong shouted, "Li Mochou! Don't ever think you will live a day longer!" And then he ran towards the left. Everybody turned their head and saw Gongsun Zhi was running to the west toward Li Mochou, who was standing on top of a small hill. They were getting closer, while Wu Santong and the others were still quite a long way away.

Just before Gongsun Zhi reached her, a hearty laugh could be heard behind the hill, and a healthy looking old man appeared. He carried a big wooden box on his back. That old man had white hair and beard, and it was none other than Zhou Botong.

“Old Urchin!” called Huang Rong, “Chase that yellow-robed Taoist priestess over here!”

“Wonderful! Watch what the Old Urchin can do!” he answered, opening his wooden box and waving his arm. A swarm of bees came out of the box and flew toward Li Mochou. Turned out that when the Mongolian soldiers burned down Mount Zhongnan, the Quanzhen disciples retreated while saving their books and other temple’s articles. He on the other hand, was busy collecting the Jade Bees and put them into this wooden box. Even though he was childish and loved to fool around, he was very smart. After a while, with the help of a jar of honey from Xiao Longnu, he figured out how to control the bees.

Seeing the grey bees, Gongsun Zhi was frightened. He turned around and ran toward the valley. Li Mochou was also shocked. There were bees behind her and enemies in front of her. She decided to run to the east. Wu Brothers, Cheng Ying, Wushuang, and the others quickly surround her with weapons unsheathed. “Shifu,” Yelu Qi called, “pull your bees back!”

Zhou Botong repeatedly shouted his commands to pull his bees back; but in the commotion the Jade Bees did not respond and kept going after the demoness. Wu Santong was afraid his archenemy would escape again, he ran toward her ignoring the bees’ attack.

While everybody was chasing Li Mochou, Yang Guo stayed where he was, still holding his wife tightly. He whispered into her ears, “Long’er ... Long’er ...” Slowly Xiao Longnu opened

her eyes. She heard the Jade Bees humming seemingly so distant. She thought she was dreaming and was inside the Ancient Tomb. Her countenance brightened a little and she whispered back, "Are we home ...?"

A short while later, she regained full consciousness and became fully aware of what was happening around her. She whistled and softly shouted her commands. Hearing their master the Jade Bees gathered above Li Mochou's head. "Shi jie [elder martial sister]," she said, "now it has come to this, aren't you going to repent of all your past crimes?"

Li Mochou's face was sheet-white. "Where's the pill?" she inquired. Her martial sister sadly smiled, "Inside that bottomless abyss." She continued, "Why did you kill that Divine Monk? If he were alive, not only he would save Guo'er's life and mine, but yours as well."

She was shocked! Her martial sister had never lied. She would never have imagined that using just one of her own "Soul Freezing Needles" would eventually kill her.

In the meantime, Wu Santong and his two sons, Cheng Ying, Lu Wushuang, and the others had formed a tight formation around her; while Zhou Botong was still busy shouting his commands. "Elder Zhou," Xiao Longnu called, "you have to whistle this way." She then gave him some examples, which were imitated by the Old Urchin. Thousands of bees immediately gathered around him and then entered the box. The old man was so delighted. "Miss Long, thank you ... thank you ..."

Observing this old man, Reverend Yideng smiled and called, "Brother Botong, it's been a long time. You look as if you did not age at all."

Zhou Botong was surprised. He quickly closed the bee box and said, "You are well, I am too. Everybody's well." He

swung the box to his shoulder and ran away without saying anything else.

Of those Li Mochou saw around her; Huang Rong, Yang Guo or Xiao Longnu alone would be enough to defeat her, let alone being surrounded on every side like this. She started to realize that she would not come out of this alive. She became desperate. She looked around and said, "Huh-huh! You consider yourself as heroes. Huh-huh! Today you will win by sheer numbers. Martial Sister! I am a disciple of the Ancient Tomb. I can't let myself be killed by an outsider. Come! You do it." She then reversed her own sword so that its blade pointed to her own chest.

Xiao Longnu shook her head, "Why would I want to kill you?" she asked.

"Li Mochou!" snapped Wu Santong. "Let me ask you this: what did you do to Lu Zhanyuan and He Yuanjun's bodies?"

The demoness trembled. "I burned them," she said menacingly. "I spread their ashes: one on the peak of Mount Hua, the other on Eastern Sea, so that they won't see each other for eternity." Her cruelty made everybody's heart pound.

"Sister Long has a benevolent heart, she won't kill you," said Lu Wushuang. "But my whole family died by your hand, not a single dog or chicken was left; only I survived. I want revenge this very day. Cousin, come!"

"My mother died by your hands," the Wu brothers continued. "Other people can show mercy to you, but my brother and I will never forgive you."

Li Mochou was indifferent, "During my life I have killed countless people; if everybody came for revenge, how many lives have I to compensate? Considering the thousands of

hatreds and tens of thousands of injustices, I have nothing more than just this one life.”

Lu Wushuang and Wu Xiuwen called out, “It’s too cheap for you!” One using a saber and the other a sword they stepped forward simultaneously.

Li Mochou exerted her energy to her sword and “Crack!” that sword was broken into two pieces. She smirked, held her hands behind her back, totally ignoring their attack.

Suddenly at that moment heavy smoke and fire appeared to the east. “Aiyo!” cried Huang Rong, “The compound is on fire!”

“Let’s postpone killing her, saving Martial Uncle’s body is more important,” said Zhu Ziliu. He leaped toward Li Mochou, and sealed three of her accupoints with his famous “Yang Solitary Finger” to prevent the priestess from escaping.

“Miss Gongsun’s body too!” cried Cheng Ying.

“Right!” answered the others. They ran toward the Valley Master Hall. The Wu Brothers dragged Li Mochou along. Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu, Huang Rong and Reverend Yideng were not far behind. They walked slowly because of the injuries. About a quarter of kilometer away from the valley complex, they began to feel the heat. People were shouting and screaming and buildings were collapsing.

“That Gongsun Zhi is really cruel,” Wu Santong said, “Miss Long should’ve killed him!”

“I don’t think it was him who’s burning this place down,” commented Zhu Ziliu. “If I am not mistaken, this is that old granny’s doing.”

“Why Qiu Qianchi?” asked Santong, “Isn’t the Passionless Valley hers?”

“Well, the valley disciples have rebelled against her. Even if we killed Gongsun Zhi, she would not be able to live here any longer,” Zhu Ziliu explained. “I think that granny is just narrow-minded ...” He did not continue and exerted his energy, quickly running to the kiln. Fortunately the kiln was a little bit away from the main complex. Hastily Zhu Ziliu lifted his Martial Uncle’s body away. The Monk’s countenance was still smiling, like he’d found something delightful just before he died.

Wu Santong shed some tears. “Martial Uncle died without suffering.”

Zhu Ziliu hesitated, “Martial Uncle was killed when he was searching for the Passionless Flower antidote,” he explained.

In the mean time, Huang Rong and her company arrived. Hearing Zhu Ziliu’s explanation, she immediately examined the Indian Monk’s body, but she could not find anything. She searched all the pockets in his clothes... nothing. “Did your Martial Uncle say anything to you?” she asked.

“No,” answered Zhu Ziliu. “When Martial Uncle and I came out of this kiln, we never thought danger was lurking.”

Huang Rong fixed her gaze on the Indian Monk’s smiling face and a thought flashed into her mind. She stooped and looked at the Divine Monk’s hands. Her heart was pounding, for she saw between his right thumb and index finger some dark-purplish grass-like herbs. Slowly she pried open his fingers and took the grass away. “What kind of grass is this?” she mused. Zhu Ziliu only shook his head. Huang Rong smelled it. The grass had an awful smell, she almost threw-up.

“Madame Guo, careful!” said Yideng, “That is ‘Intestine Severing’ grass. It’s very poisonous.” Huang Rong stared blankly. She lost hope.

At that moment the Wu brothers along with Li Mochou arrived. Upon hearing that the grass was very dangerous, Xiuwen said to Huang Rong, "Shiniang [martial female master - Shifu's wife], let's give that grass to this demoness."

"Shan zai! Shan zai! [lit. good, peace] Young man, don't be so cruel," Yideng rebuked him.

"Grand Martial Master," said Xiuwen, "Are we supposed to show mercy to an evil person like this woman?"

By now the fire had reached the trees and bushes around the kiln.

"The fire comes from the east, let us retreat to that hilly area to the north, and talk this matter over," Huang Rong gave her command. Everybody complied and as they arrived there, the buildings around the kiln had started to burn.

Although Li Mochou's accupoints were sealed, she was still able to walk, but without her internal energy. Secretly cursing her bad luck she tried to unseal herself. She thought she would try to escape when the enemy was not looking. Unexpectedly, her chest and stomach hurt like hell as soon as she did that, "Ah!" she screamed in agony. What happened was that she had depressed the poison using her internal energy before. However, when her accupoints were sealed, her energy was also neutralized. Now that she tried to circulate her energy, the poison was flowing alongside and attacked her inner organs.

Her eyes saw stars floating around; she was writhing in agony and almost lost consciousness. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu walked toward her, but what she saw was a young couple, a handsome man and a lovely young woman and right in front of her they suddenly turned into Lu Zhanyuan and He Yuanjun. She leaped and screamed, "Zhanyuan! You are so cruel! You still have a face to see me?" Because she

was thinking about love, the poison in her body became more active than ever. She was in so much pain that her body writhed, her face contorted and white as a sheet of paper. She looked so frightening. Everybody stepped back a few steps seeing her behaving like a mad woman.

Li Mochou had always been a proud woman; never in her life did she ask any favor from anybody. But with her dying breath she cried incessantly, "Oohh... ah! Help! Ohh ... somebody help me, please ..." Her voice was truly heartrending.

"The only one who could help you was my Martial Uncle," Zhu Ziliu answered and pointed to the Indian Monk's body. "Why did you kill him?"

"Yes! I killed him!" the demoness gritted her teeth and screamed, "I've killed all kinds of people, good people, bad people, I killed them all! I want to die! Why are you still alive? I want you to die with me!" Her body swayed, her breathing shortened, and suddenly she lunged toward Wu Dunru's sword.

For many-many years Wu Dunru had dreamed of stabbing the demoness with his very own sword. However, at that moment he was taken aback, and pulled his sword away unwittingly. Li Mochou missed the sword; she fell down to the ground and her body rolled away toward the blazing flames in the valley below.

Everybody shouted! In a flash her clothes were like a giant torch, blazing with fire. She struggled and eventually managed to stand up in the middle of the flames.

Xiao Longnu, remembering their sisterhood, was the only one compassionate toward her. She immediately cried, "Sister, get out of there!" But Li Mochou did not budge, it seemed like she was not even feeling the intense heat. It was a

terrifying scene ... everybody's eyes were wide open. Suddenly, from her mouth came a heartrending voice; she was singing ...!

*O mortals, what is love? That binds beyond life on earth?
To all corners, in pair we fly... braving summer and winter, by
and by...*

*Union is bliss, parting is woe, agony is boundless, for a
lovelorn soul, sweetheart...*

Give me word, trail of clouds drifting forward...

*And mountains capped with snow, whither shall my
lonesome shadow go? [Noodle's translation]*

Her voice was getting weaker and weaker, until it finally faded away amidst the raging fire ...

[Her song, Liu Bo - flowing waves - was the one she used to sing with Lu Zhanyuan, when they were still together. She also sang it with tears flowing down her cheeks when Yang Guo and Cheng Ying were playing and singing this song - see Chapter 15]

Xiao Longnu could not hold her tears back any longer. She sobbed uncontrollably in Yang Guo's single arm. Nobody was exempt from feeling sadness creeping into his or her heart. The 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' finally paid for her sins with a well-deserved death; however, they could not help but feel pity for her. She was actually a weak and blind woman; weakened and blinded by love.

Wu Santong and his two sons, Lu Wushuang and Cheng Ying had a very deep animosity toward her, and had always wanted their revenge. But now that she was dead, they did not feel a single bit of joy in their hearts. Huang Rong remembered how the demoness - despite of her evil and cruel character - had taken care of her little Guo Xiang with love and kindness for many-many days. She then lifted the baby up, put her little hands together, and waved them

toward the blazing fire as a gesture of final respect toward the ill-fated woman.

Yang Guo looked at the fire then turned his gaze toward the Valley Master Hall. He sighed ceaselessly. He had rushed from the Broken Heart Cliff toward the building complex to save Lu'E's body from the fire. Yet now he saw the whole complex was burned down almost to the ground. He felt a deep sense of loss. He remembered both women, Lu'E and Li Mochou. One was an angel, the other a demon. Both died and became ashes because of love. Without even realizing it, tears started flowing down his cheeks.

While Yang Guo was still staring blankly into the fire, a long, loud and terrifying laugh was heard, coming from the top of the hill to their northeast. That voice was supported by a high level of internal energy. "Qiu Qianchi!" Yang Guo was startled. "How did she climb that hill?"

Xiao Longnu's heart stirred. "Let's ask her if she has another Passionless Pill in her hand," she said.

"Long'er...ah Long'er! Are you still dreaming?" her husband said with bitter smile.

Huang Rong, Wu Santong, Zhu Ziliu and the others heard what Xiao Longnu said; they thought, "What's wrong in asking her? If we can get the pill, Yang Guo needs to be compelled to take it; we can't let him deliberately destroy the pill and die." Almost everybody had the same thought, as a matter of fact, several of them immediately said, "Let's go and take a look." Wu Santong and his sons, Yelu Qi, Wanyan Ping and the others rushed toward the hill. Yang Guo sighed and shook his head. "Only if you can find a divine pill to save both husband and wife's lives ..."

Cheng Ying, who all this time stood quietly beside him, suddenly said, "Yang Da Ge, you should not belittle

everybody's loving concern toward you. We love you. Let us go together." As we all know, Cheng Ying had always loved Yang Guo, and treated him with nothing but kindness. Yang Guo was not unaware of that fact. Even though he had already given his heart to another, he had always regarded Cheng Ying with nothing but respect and brotherly love. The young miss had never asked him for anything until now. How could he refuse? Therefore, he nodded his head and said, "Very well, let us see what evil scheme that old hag on top of that hill has."

Quickly they climbed the hill toward Qiu Qianchi. Very soon Yang Guo could see that it was the hill where the old granny, together with Lu'E and himself had escaped from the underground cave. The trees and everything around were still the same, but the golden-hearted lady was no longer here. He sighed and was deeply saddened.

Within about a 'li' they could see from afar that Qiu Qianchi was sitting on a chair on the hilltop. She was laughing with a creepy voice, and kept looking off in the distance. She looked and behaved like a mad woman. "I think she's gone crazy," said Wushuang.

"Don't get too close," said Huang Rong, "That woman is so cruel that we have to be on our guard against her evil schemes. In my opinion she is not crazy."

Everybody stopped. They were wary of the old granny's iron date stones. Carefully Huang Rong approached her, but before she said anything, somebody appeared from behind a big rock. He was wearing a blue robe, and was none other than Gongsun Zhi himself. Laughing menacingly he took his robe off, and with his profound internal energy, made the robe hard and stiff like a stick. Huang Rong and the others were impressed with this internal energy demonstration. "Wicked woman," he cursed, "You have destroyed everything

I had, and everything my ancestors had owned, with a torch. I will not show any mercy to you!" And he ran toward her.

With a swish sound Qiu Qianchi launched a stone, stopping Gongsun Zhi's attack. From the top of that hill the stone could reach far and it also created a violent wind gust. Gongsun Zhi parried with his robe. The stone penetrated several layers of cloth, but did not hurt him at all. Gongsun Zhi was able to neutralize her "hard" energy with his "soft". He was initially not sure if he could withstand her stone, but in his anger toward the granny who burned down everything he had, he was determined to kill her. Besides, he knew that as soon as the intruders intervened, he wouldn't be able to even get near her. Therefore, he was delighted to find that his energy was sufficient to counter Qiu Qianchi's.

Shouting a terrifying cry he leaped towards her.

"Help!" cried Qiu Qianchi, her eyes wide open.

"Mother... That granny's going to die!" said Guo Fu, her heart pounding.

"I don't understand," Huang Rong said, her eyes never leaving those two people, "She is not crazy, but why did she act like it? Was it to lure Gongsun Zhi here?"

In the mean time two more swishing sounds were heard, Qiu Qianchi launched two date stones in close succession. Gongsun Zhi again used his robe while leaping forward. Suddenly, he vanished from sight in a blink of the eyes. The granny opened her mouth to laugh.

That laugh only sent out two "Ha .. ha ..." when suddenly a long robe appeared from below. Like a snake it wrapped itself around the leg of the chair Qiu Qianchi was sitting on. A fraction of a second later that chair flew down into the opening, taking Qiu Qianchi with it. Qiu Qianchi's laughter

turned into a terrifying cry intermingled with Gongsun Zhi's cry of horror. Then everything fell silent ...

Everyone witnessed and heard everything, but nobody knew what had really happened; except Yang Guo. He sighed and softly said, "Revenge! Revenge!" Quickly, Huang Rong and the others climbed to the hilltop. There they saw four female bodies lying around near a big hole in the ground. Looking down, all they could see was darkness.

In her desire to seek revenge, Qiu Qianchi had become more cruel and evil than ever. After burning the building complex, she commanded four slave girls to carry her to that hilltop, to the underground cave mouth, where she and her daughter were rescued by Yang Guo. She commanded the girls to cover the hole with tree branches and leaves. Afterwards, she cruelly murdered them with her iron date stones. Then she pretended to be crazy to lure Gongsun Zhi. Her cry for help when Gongsun Zhi first attacked was part of her ploy to lure him closer.

Gongsun Zhi had forgotten the cave entrance; hence he fell into her trap. In his last struggle to save his own life, he threw his robe up, with the hope that he could use the chair as an anchor to pull himself out of the hole. Unfortunately, the chair – with Qiu Qianchi on it, fell down into the cave because his pull was too strong. So it happened that, husband and wife became archenemies, and died together on the same day, on the same hour, smashed together inside that underground cave.

Yang Guo then told the rest what he knew about their life story. Everybody sighed and could not help but feel sorry for them. Cheng Ying along with Yelu Qi and his sister dug a big hole and buried the bodies of the four slave girls.

The fire was still raging down in the valley, and the whole building complex was destroyed. There were no other

buildings around for them to rest in. Besides, after witnessing so many deaths that day, nobody wanted to stay around much longer.

"Brother Yang has not found cure for his injury, we have to find another doctor promptly," Zhu Ziliu said. Several others voiced their agreement.

"No," said Huang Rong. "We cannot leave today."

"What is your suggestion then, Madame Guo?" asked Zhu Ziliu.

Huang Rong knitted her eyebrows, "I receive an injury from Qiu Qianchi's date stone, and it hurts badly right now," she answered. "Could we stay overnight here, please? We will leave tomorrow first thing in the morning. What do you say?"

Of course nobody objected. They spread out and searched for some caves or anywhere suitable to stay overnight.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu walked hand in hand going down the hill, but before they got too far, they heard Huang Rong call, "Sister Long, could you come over here, please? I have something to discuss with you." Having said this she put Guo Xiang in Guo Fu's care and walked toward Xiao Longnu.

Holding Xiao Longnu's hand she turned her head toward Yang Guo and smiled, "Guo'er, don't you worry. She has become your wife, and I certainly will not try to persuade her to leave you."

Yang Guo smiled but didn't say anything. He couldn't help wondering in his heart, "What does Auntie Guo want to talk about?" He saw Huang Rong holding Xiao Longnu's hand, walking toward a big tree and then they both sat down underneath it. Yang Guo felt a little bit of uneasiness, but he felt it was not proper for him to sneak in and eavesdrop on

them. "Long'er has never concealed anything from me, why would I worry she wouldn't tell me about it?" he thought.

"Sister Long," Huang Rong began. "My spoiled brat daughter has caused you and Guo'er many miseries. I feel really bad."

Xiao Longnu just smiled and said, "Oh, it's alright." But in her heart she was thinking, "Her single Soul Freezing Needle is taking both of our lives, what good is your apology?"

Seeing her dark expression Huang Rong felt even worse. She did not enter the Ancient Tomb, hence did not know the whole story. She remembered how Wu Santong and Yang Guo himself had suffered injury from the needles, yet they fully recovered. She did not know that Xiao Longnu was poisoned when she was reversing her blood flow; hence, Guo Fu's needle was a death sentence for her.

"There is one thing I do not understand about Yang Guo, and I want to ask your explanation," she inquired further. "By risking your own life you had succeeded in getting the pill back from Gongsun Zhi. Why was Yang Guo not willing to take it? Why throw it down the ravine instead? Why? I really don't understand."

Xiao Longnu sighed slightly, said in her heart, "I am about to die and Guo'er's love for me is very deep, how could he live alone? But things have come this far and I don't want to create more trouble." She only said, "Yang Guo has a strong character."

"Guo'er's heart is full of love," said Huang Rong, "Could it be that because Miss Gongsun sacrificed her life for the pill, Yang Guo did not have the heart to take it? Thus he is willing to sacrifice his own life to repay her love. Sister, that action shows his benevolent character, deserving our highest respect. However, we cannot make the dead live again. On

the other hand, his stubbornness in refusing any antidote would negate Miss Gongsun's sacrifice."

Xiao Longnu nodded her head.

Huang Rong paused for a moment, and then continued, "You have risked your life battling Gongsun Zhi on the stone bridge above the Broken Heart Cliff. That was also an act of ultimate sacrifice. Yang Guo will listen to nobody but you alone. Therefore, my Sister, please talk with him and persuade him for his own good."

Xiao Longnu could not hold her tears any longer; they flowed down her lovely cheeks. "If only he were willing to listen to me ... but even then, where can we find another Passionless Pill?" she said, sobbing.

"There are no more Passionless Pills in this whole wide world," Huang Rong said, "but I believe there is another antidote to neutralize the poison in him. What I feel is most difficult is to get him to take it."

Xiao Longnu was surprised and delighted at the same time. "Is that so?" she stood up and asked, "Is ... is there another antidote?"

Huang Rong pulled her hand, "Please sit down." She groped her pocket and took the purplish grass out. "This is the 'Severed Intestine Grass' [duan chang cao] that was in the Divine Indian Monk's hand when he died. According to Brother Zhu, he was searching for the antidote when that needle took his life. As you also witnessed, Sister, even though he was dead, his countenance showed a satisfied smile. My only conclusion is that he was satisfied because he found this grass, which is the antidote to the Passionless Flower. According to my Master - the Venerable Hong Qigong - inside a snake's lair always exist some kind of plant, which is the antidote of that particular snake's venom. This fact also

holds true for other kinds of poisons as well. Natural Law, it is how nature governs itself. This grass indeed grew underneath the Passionless Flower. We only knew that this grass is poisonous; however, after pondering for a while, I realize that this grass is the antidote to the flower. Poison against poison. One poison neutralizes the other.”

Xiao Longnu listened to her explanation and repeatedly nodded her head in agreement.

Huang Rong continued, “Taking this poisonous grass indeed poses a great risk; but we don’t have any other alternative right now, we need to take this risk. In my opinion, I am 90% confident that this medicine will be effective.” She knew that Huang Rong was very intelligent, and listening to her confidence, she could not help but feel her own confidence grow as well. Besides, as Huang Rong said, they did not have any other alternative anyway. After witnessing Li Mochou’s suffering caused by the Passion Flower she felt that for Yang Guo to die from the grass’ poison would be preferable to dying of the flower’s poison. Therefore, after a moment or two careful consideration, she made up her mind and said confidently, “Very well. Let me persuade him to take the grass.”

Huang Rong immediately reached in her pocket and took out several handfuls of grass and gave it to Xiao Longnu. “I picked these grasses along the way, and I believe these handfuls would be sufficient,” she said. “You will have to tell him to try a few strands of grass first, while protecting his internal organs with his energy. If it works, then he can take more later.”

Xiao Longnu then put the grass into her pocket and stood up, then knelt down in front of Huang Rong. “Guo’er ... he ... he’s an orphan and has nobody to look after him. He has suffered a lot,” she was choked up ... “He is rash and often

times does whatever his heart desires ... I beg Madame Guo to look after him."

Huang Rong quickly lifted her up. "Guo'er is under your loving care, and I trust you are a hundred times better than me in this matter," she was emotional as well, "After Xiangyang is saved from the Mongols, we shall go together to the Peach Blossom Island and have some good times together."

As intelligent as she was, Madame Guo did not have any clue as to why Xiao Longnu had asked her the favor. Xiao Longnu expected she would die any moment and had asked Huang Rong to take care of Yang Guo.

While his wife was having a conversation with Huang Rong, Yang Guo waited patiently. Now that he saw his wife stand up and walk away, he immediately came to her. "Guo'er," said Xiao Longnu, smiling sweetly, "our days are numbered. Let us not be burdened with other's business and just be together, you and I... Would you accompany me looking around this place?"

"Good!" Yang Guo replied, "I was just going to propose the same thing." Holding hands they left the crowd and walked slowly down a quiet path..

They hadn't walked too far when they saw a young couple having a quiet talk under a tree. It was Wu Dunru and Yelu Yan. Yang Guo smiled and turned the other way. Again, they hadn't walked too far when suddenly somebody ran out of the bushes ahead, laughing merrily, with somebody behind, chasing her. It was Wanyan Ping, being chased by Wu Xiuwen. "I want to know where you are going!" cried the young man. Seeing Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu, Wanyan Ping blushed. "Brother Yang, Sister Long," she greeted them sheepishly. Then she ran toward the forest to their left. Xiuwen was not too far behind.

“O mortals, what is love? That binds beyond life on earth?” Yang Guo softly murmured. He was silent for a minute before continuing, “Those two brothers were fighting to the death to win Miss Guo’s attention. Only a short time later they love someone else already. There are people in this world who could love only one person – for life. Yet there are others like Gongsun Zhi and Qiu Qianchi who turned love into hatred. Ay! ‘O mortals, what is love? That binds beyond life on earth?’ this is a very deep question and worthy to be pondered.” Xiao Longnu was silent. She put her head down, quietly walked along, like she was thinking very hard.

They arrived at a foothill a little while later. Looking up they could see the sun was low on the mountain top. Its red rays illuminating purple clouds in the blue sky. The evening mist starting to cover up the mountain peaks. It was a beautiful evening beyond words. They were convinced that they would not be together much longer; they were reluctant to part with this beautiful scenery.

“Guo’er,” Xiao Longnu suddenly broke the silence, “didn’t you say that after we are dead, our spirits will go to the underworld? Is it true there is a Yan Luowang [king of the underworld]?”

“I do hope so,” answered Yang Guo. “Even if the underworld was a sea of blades, boiling oil, or other kind torture, I would rather the underworld exist, than having our souls separated for eternity.”

“That’s true,” said his wife, “I do too; hope that there is an underworld somewhere. People say that on the way there an old granny meets the departing spirit and gives that spirit a bowl of water that makes the spirit forget everything mortal. As for me, I would refuse to drink that water. Guo’er, you have to promise me that you won’t forget my love forever.”

Xiao Longnu was raised and trained by the Ancient Tomb Sect, where she learned how to suppress all emotions. Therefore, while her heart was broken, she was able to speak with a steady voice. Yang Guo, on the other hand, could not hold back his tears any longer. He quickly walked away, turned his head from his wife and wiped his eyes with his sleeve.

Xiao Longnu sighed. "Ah! How can we mortals know anything about the underworld matters?" she said, "But if I were given any choice, I would rather live forever with you Guo'er, look! That flower is very pretty."

Yang Guo turned his head to where his wife was pointing, and he saw a beautiful red flower. It was so big, bigger than a rice bowl. The flower was swaying from the soft early evening breeze. It looked like a peony [mu dan] yet different; it looked similar to the type called 'Chinese Peony' [shao yao] yet different. "This flower is truly rare; it is still winter, but it blooms so brightly. If I were to give this flower a name, I would name it 'Dragon Lady Flower' [Longnu Hua]." He stooped down, picked the stem of the flower, and slipped it into his wife's hair.

"Thank you, for giving me a beautiful flower, and for giving the flower a beautiful name," Xiao Longnu smiled. After walking a little bit longer they sat down on a grassy hill, resting. "Guo'er, do you still remember everything you promised when I took you as my disciple?" asked the young madam.

"Why wouldn't I?" he answered.

"Well, do you remember taking an oath to always obey what I command as long as you live?" she continued, "Whatever I say, you cannot disobey. But I have become your wife now. Tell me, do I have to obey you, or will you forever obey me because I was your master and teacher? What do you think?"

"I will always obey you," promised Yang Guo. "Teacher's word has to be obeyed. Wife's word even more, I cannot disobey."

"Hmm!" said his wife, "It's good to know you remembered."

They sat shoulder-to-shoulder, leaning against each other, enjoying the beautiful dusk scenery around them. From a distance they heard Wu Santong calling them for dinner. They looked at each other and smiled. Who would want to eat while enjoying this breathtakingly wonderful time?

Eventually, the sun set, and the moon slowly rose. Night was falling. They were tired, and unwittingly fell asleep.

Yang Guo stirred and opened his eyes around midnight. The weather had turned cold. Half-asleep he asked his wife, "Long'er, are you cold?" He stretched out his arm, wanting to embrace her. With a sudden jolt he felt like his blood was drained completely from his body, because his hand only grabbed a handful of dirt! He leaped up instantly. His wife was nowhere to be seen! He looked everywhere, but all he could see were mountaintops and trees, gleaming under the silver light of the moon. He stretched his neck, trying to listen; but all he could hear was a gentle breeze, carrying soft chirping and buzzing of the little critters. Where could Xiao Longnu be? His heart was pounding very hard! He exerted his internal energy, ran to the hilltop and shouted at the top of his lungs, "Long'er! Long'er!"

Frantically he dashed to another hilltop. "Long'er! Long'er!" His voice echoed throughout the valley. "Long'er! Long'er ...!" but Xiao Longnu did not answer. Yang Guo's heart turned cold, "Where could she go? She slept next to me; it is impossible for an enemy to capture her, or even a beast to harm her without my knowing."

His cry had awakened Yideng, Huang Rong, Zhu Ziliu and the others. Knowing what happened, immediately they spread

out around the valley, trying to find the young madam; while their hearts were puzzled. Xiao Longnu was nowhere to be seen, even after searching high and low.

Yang Guo was running around like crazy. A moment later they gathered together again. Yang Guo also stopped running, he thought, "She must have left of her own will, otherwise I would certainly know; but why? I believe Mrs. Guo had something to do with it. She once ran away from me and went to the Passionless Valley because of her." Because of this thought his blood boiled and he exploded, "Auntie Guo! What exactly did you say to her this afternoon?"

Huang Rong herself was confounded; she did not have any idea why Xiao Longnu would suddenly disappear. She saw Yang Guo's veins showing on his face and neck, and realized how critical this moment was. "I only advised her to persuade you to take the 'Severed Intestine Grass' to neutralize the poison inside your body," she explained patiently.

"Since her life cannot be saved, do you really think I would want to live alone?" Yang Guo screamed.

"Don't you worry," said his auntie soothingly, "Miss Long possesses a very high level of martial arts. It is unthinkable that something bad has happened to her that she could not overcome. Why did you say 'her life cannot be saved'?"

In his unbearable grief Yang Guo lost his temper and snapped, "Huh! This is all your precious daughter's doing. She struck her with a 'Soul Freezing Needle' while she was reversing her blood flow, so that the lethal poison attacked her internal organs. My wife is not a deity, how could she endure that?"

How would Huang Rong know what had happened? Her daughter indeed told her that she had accidentally injured the Yang - Long couple with a Soul Freezing Needle'; but

those two were from the Ancient Tomb Sect, the same sect Li Mochou was from. Certainly they must have the antidote. Yes, they would be hurt momentarily, but she did not think the poison would threaten their lives. Yang Guo's answer was like a thunderbolt from a blue sky. Her countenance was sheet-white. Now she understood, "So it turns out Guo'er was adamant about not taking the pill because he would rather die than live alone. But where could Xiao Longnu go?" She looked up towards the hill where Gongsun Zhi and Qiu Qianchi met their tragic ends. She shuddered involuntarily.

Yang Guo had kept his gaze on Huang Rong and understood why she shuddered. He was shocked and angry beyond any reasoning. "You knew it! You knew she is beyond help and persuaded her to kill herself to save my life, didn't you?" he screamed. "You think you are doing me a big favor, but ... but ... I HATE YOU!!!" His chest tightened, he fainted and collapsed to the ground. Reverend Yideng immediately gave him a massage and after a moment he regained his consciousness.

"I only persuaded her to save your life," said Huang Rong, "I have never told anybody to commit suicide. Whether you believe me or you don't, it's up to you."

Everybody was looking at each other, they did not know what to say or do. "Let us go to that hilltop and take a look," Huang Rong said. Everybody left at once. But the hole on that hilltop was deep and so dark, they could not see anything.

"I think we'd better make a rope for me to go down into the cave to investigate," Cheng Ying broke the silence. "Perhaps ... perhaps ... Sister-in-law slipped ..."

Huang Rong sighed. "Very well, let's find out."

They immediately unsheathed their weapons and gathered tree bark, which was then braided into a long rope. They worked hard and around dawn, more than a hundred zhangs [a zhang is approximately 10 feet or 3 meters] of rope was ready. Several of the youngsters immediately offered to go down first. "Let me go first," said Yang Guo.

Everybody looked at Huang Rong for approval. Mrs. Guo thought hard. She was sure that if she said 'no', Yang Guo would insist on going anyway; but if she said 'yes' and – God forbid – Xiao Longnu were found inside, Yang Guo would certainly not be willing to come back up. While she hesitated, Cheng Ying once again offered a solution, "Brother Yang, let me go. Don't you trust me?"

Other than his wife, Cheng Ying was the only person Yang Guo loved and respected. Besides, he felt weak from excessive grief anyway, so he just nodded his agreement.

Wu Santong and his sons, along with Yelu Qi slowly lowered Miss Cheng into the opening. The cave entrance was located on or near the hilltop, so we can safely conclude that the depth of the cave is approximately the same as the height of the hill itself. Therefore, when they had almost run out of rope, Cheng Ying finally reached the bottom.

Everybody stood around the hole without making any sound; intently looking at the hole, waiting for some word from Cheng Ying. It was a suspenseful moment, as it seemed like Cheng Ying stayed in the cave for a long time.

Huang Rong and Zhu Ziliu exchanged a glance; they both had a similar thought, "If Xiao Longnu is really dead inside, Yang Guo would surely jump into the hole. We must not let him do so."

Yang Guo caught sight of their exchange, he thought, "If I really want to die, I can do that quietly, no need to involve all

of you; unlike that foolish couple earlier."

Suddenly the rope in Wu Santong's hands moved. "Quick! Pull!" Guo Fu and the Wu Brothers shouted almost simultaneously. Quickly they helped pulling the rope. Even before she reached the top, Cheng Ying had shouted at top of her lungs, "Not here! Sister-in-law is not here!"

Everybody was so relieved that they sighed almost simultaneously. A little later Cheng Ying reached the top and immediately said, "I have looked every where, every corner of the cave. Nothing was there except Gongsun Zhi and Qiu Qianchi's bodies."

Zhu Ziliu spoke in a low and somewhat muffled voice: "We have looked everywhere, so I think Miss Long has already left the valley."

Suddenly, Lu Wushuang said, "There is another place where we have not gone to look. Perhaps she is trying to fish that Passionless Pill out..."

Yang Guo's heart skipped a beat. Before Lu Wushuang could finish speaking, he dashed towards the Broken Heart Cliff. As he ran, he shouted: "Long'er, Long'er!" When he got to the edge of the cliff, he looked into the deep ravine below. All he saw was a vast sheet of grayish mist, how could anyone be seen in there?

He thought, "Long'er's thoughts are simple and pure. If she had any problems, she would have certainly not kept them from me." Then, he recalled the words that Xiao Longnu had uttered earlier, "She had asked me only to remember forever the vow that she had asked of me. I would naturally never go against her wishes, so why was there even a need to speak of it? But she did not even ask anything of me in the first place."

Lifting his head, he said in a soft voice: "Long'er, Long'er, where exactly have you gone? What are the words that you want me to obey?" Looking across the ravine at the Broken Heart Cliff, he could almost imagine the indistinct figure of a woman in white with a red flower in the hair by one of her temples. The woman seemed to move swiftly as she engaged Gongsun Zhi in an intense battle with the pair of swords in her hands.

"Long'er!" called Yang Guo. Then, pulling himself together, he realized that Xiao Longnu was not there. All he saw were floating sheets of whitish mist ... but that red flower was indeed at the bottom of the opposite cliff.

Struck by the oddity of the discovery, he thought, "When Long'er fought Gongsun Zhi in that place yesterday, the flower was certainly not there. The whole area is nothing but rock that does not encourage even the growth of grass or trees; how can there be any flowers? If I say that the wind blew the flower there; that would be too much of a coincidence."

Exerting his internal energy he leaped toward the cliff and crossed the stone bridge. His chest tightened! That flower was the one he slipped into his wife's hair just a few hours ago. He was sure of it, since one side of the flower was a bit flattened.

Yang Guo bent down and picked the flower up. Underneath it he found a paper package, which he hastily opened. Inside he found a few strands of purple grass, the "Severed Intestine Grass". His heart was beating fast. He looked at the paper, but he found nothing, not even a single stroke of a character was to be seen.

Suddenly he heard Lu Wushuang shout, "Brother Yang, what are you doing?"

He turned his head and his gaze was caught by two lines of characters carved by a sword on the cliff's wall. It read, "Sixteen years from now we will meet here. The love between husband and wife is profoundly great. Do not break your promise." Underneath was carved in smaller characters, "Xiao Longnu addresses my husband Yang-Lang. Please treasure this and I beg that you fulfill this reunion."

Yang Guo stared at those characters like he was losing his mind. His head felt dizzy. He really could not decipher what it meant. Unanswerable questions kept floating around in his mind. "She wants me to meet her here in sixteen years; then where did she go? She is heavily poisoned, she might not survive another ten days or even half a year; how can she wait sixteen years? She knows I threw the Passionless Pill away, why did she ask me to wait sixteen years?" The more he thought, the more his mind was confused; he staggered a few times and almost fell down.

The others stood on the opposite side of the cliff and saw his dazed and confused condition; they were afraid he might make a wrong step and fall down into the bottomless abyss below. But the stone bridge was so narrow that only one person could stand on it. Yang Guo's martial arts were so profound that if someone went to him and he acted up they would certainly die together. Huang Rong frowned and turning to Cheng Ying she said, "Shimei [Younger Martial Sister], go talk to him. I think he will listen to you."

"Very well, I will go to him," she responded, leaping onto the rock, and walking slowly toward Yang Guo.

Hearing footsteps coming near Yang Guo snapped, "Go away!" He turned his head with fire in his eyes.

"Yang Da Ge, it's me," the young miss said softly. "I just want to help you find Yang Da Sao, nothing else." Yang Guo stared hard at her sad face. Slowly his countenance softened.

"Is this red flower left by Sister-in-law?" asked Cheng Ying, approaching him.

"Yes," he said, "She wants me to wait sixteen years...Why sixteen years?"

Cheng Ying read the message. She was perplexed. "Madame Guo is very intelligent, nothing can get past her," she said, "Why don't we ask her what she thinks. I am sure she can solve this puzzle."

"That's right," said Yang Guo, "Be careful! That stone is slippery."

They immediately walked back down and told everything they knew to Huang Rong.

She was silent for a moment, frowning deeply. Suddenly her eyes lit. Clapping her hands she exclaimed, "Guo'er, Congratulations, congratulations!"

Yang Guo was flabbergasted. He was shocked but a bit thrilled at the same time, "What ... Why ... What for?" He stammered.

"Congratulations! How can I not congratulate you!" his auntie was laughing ecstatically. "Sister Long has met the 'Divine Nun of the South Sea' [nan hai zhen ni]. This is a very extraordinary destiny."

Yang Guo's face looked puzzled: "Divine Nun of the South Sea? Who's that?"

"Nan Hai Shen Ni is a divine Buddhist nun with a very high level of martial arts," she explained, "Just how high her skill is, nobody can tell. Because she seldom comes to the mainland, almost nobody in the Central Plains knew her big name. My father met her and was taught a very high-level

fist technique. That was sixteen, thirty-two ... yes, it was thirty-two years ago."

"Thirty-two years ago?" Yang Guo repeated absent-mindedly.

"Yes," she continued, "I think the 'Divine Nun of the South Sea' is almost a hundred years old now. According to my father, she always visits the mainland once every sixteen years. Woe to the evil men who crosses her path. She has a benevolent heart and is always ready to help anybody in need. I am sure Miss Long has met her, was taken as her disciple, and was taken back to the South Sea."

"Sixteen years ... sixteen ... Reverend, is there such person?" Yang Guo turned to Yideng. His voice was hoarse.

Yideng was about to answer with an "hmm" when Huang Rong quickly cut him off. "The 'Divine Nun of the South Sea' excels in martial arts, but her character is a bit weird. Reverend, have you ever met her?"

"The old monk is unfortunate, he has not met her," he answered, shaking his head.

Huang Rong sighed. "Ah, that Senior is really ignorant," she said, "to separate a young couple like that...and for sixteen years! Sister Long already possesses a level high martial art. After sixteen years, wouldn't her husband looked like chicken compared to her?" Then she burst out in laughter.

"No, Auntie Guo, I don't think that was what she had in mind," countered Yang Guo.

"What then?" asked the aunt? Without further ado Yang Guo reminded her, that Guo Fu unintentionally struck her with a "Soul Freezing Needle" while his wife was reversing her blood flow to cure her injury. That caused the poison to attack her internal organs. "If what you said is true, I think the Shen Ni is trying to cure her within that sixteen years period." He

sighed, "You know, before this new development, I thought Long'er's condition was terminal."

"That spoiled brat of mine truly has caused you two too many troubles," said Mrs. Guo. "I think you are right. That poison has resided inside Sister Long's body for too long. Even if she was given a miracle cure, she would certainly need a long time to recover fully. Guo'er, let us hope that Sister Long will recover sooner, and that the 'Divine Nun of the South Sea' will release her sooner too."

Yang Guo was lost in thought with a heart full of questions. It was hard to believe his auntie, yet the Xiao Longnu's letter seemed to corroborate her argument. If she killed herself, why would she say sixteen years? Suddenly he turned his gaze toward Huang Rong and asked, "Auntie Guo, how do you know Nan Hai Shen Ni took Long'er away? Why didn't Long'er say so in the message, so that I wouldn't worry?"

"I came to that conclusion because of the words 'sixteen years later'," she explained. "I know this for a fact, that the 'Divine Nun of the South Sea' visits the mainland only once every sixteen years. Nobody else has that peculiar habit. Reverend, have you known anybody else with that custom?"

"No," he answered.

"Father said that the Shen Ni does not like to be mentioned," Mrs. Guo continued, "so it's understandable if Sister Long did not mention her name in the message. My only concern is that I am not sure the 'Severed Intestine Grass' will save your life. If ... Ay! ... if sixteen years pass and Sister Long comes back and she cannot see you, it is very possible that ... that she would not want to live any longer."

Yang Guo shed some more tears. He could see clearly in his mind a shadow of things to come. He saw a white shadow; it

was his wife, comeback to meet him sixteen years from now. He then saw his wife was grieving because he was no more.

A gentle breeze blew and Yang Guo shivered. "Auntie Guo," he said, "I think I'd better go to the South Sea to find her. Do you know where the Shen Ni lives?"

"Guo'er, don't be silly," rebuked his auntie softly, "The 'Great Wisdom Island' [da zhi dao] where the Shen Ni lives has never been visited by strangers. Woe to the man who visits the island uninvited. My Father received her tutelage, but even Father has never set foot on this island. Now that she's taken Sister Long under her wing, I am confident that someday you two will meet again. What is sixteen years anyway? It will pass in the blink of an eye. Why do you have to rush?"

Yang Guo looked intently at Huang Rong's face and asked, "Auntie Guo, are you telling me the truth?"

"You go and examine that message," she countered, "If that message was not written by Sister Long, you can say whatever you want."

"It was indeed written by Long'er herself." Yang Guo said, "Every time she writes the character 'Yang', she always add a short stroke on the right. Nobody writes it like that."

"Very good, then," said his auntie, clapping her hands. "Honestly, I wasn't sure myself. I thought it was too much of a coincidence. I thought it was Brother Zhu's doing trying to comfort you."

Yang Guo was lost in thought again, his eyes stared hard at the Broken Heart Cliff. "Very well," he finally said, "I will take the 'Severed Intestine Grass'. If it fails, I hope sixteen years from now Auntie will tell my poor wife everything." He turned to Zhu Ziliu and asked, "Uncle Zhu, how do I take the grass?"

Zhu Ziliu only knew the 'Severed Intestine Grass' was a poisonous plant. He had no idea on how that poison would neutralize other poisons. Therefore, he turned to Yideng and asked, "Shifu, I think we need your insight on this matter."

Extending his right hand forefinger, Yideng quickly sealed four of Yang Guo's accupoints: the 'shao hai' [lit. lesser sea], 'tong li' [lit. open inside], 'shen men' [lit. divine gate], and 'shao chong' [lit. little highway]. These four accupoints can be classified as the basic positive passages of the 'shou shao yang xin jing' [elementary positive heart manual(?)]. Yang Guo felt a warm feeling flowing from these accupoints toward his chest, and loosened the tightness in his breast. "The Passionless Poison mostly attacks the organs closely linked to the feelings or emotions," Yideng explained, "The 'Severed Intestine Grass' poison would most likely attack your heart as well. Therefore, I sealed your four accupoints to protect your heart. Go ahead, take some strands."

Yang Guo bowed to express his gratitude.

Yideng sighed, "If my Martial Brother were here, he would know how to take it properly, so that we would not have to make a wild guess."

When the Divine Indian Monk was killed by Li Mochou, Yang Guo thought Xiao Longnu was beyond hope, so he desired to die; but now he was determined to live for at least sixteen years longer. He put the grass into his mouth and started to chew, then swallowed it. The 'Severed Intestine Grass' was very bitter, but he endured it. He thought of how miserable Xiao Longnu would be if, sixteen years from now, she came back and did not see him. He quickly sat down and exerted his internal energy to protect his heart, liver, and other sensitive organs.

After not too long, he started to feel his stomach growling, followed by excruciating pain like he had swallowed

thousands of needles. The name 'Severed Intestine' was not an empty name. He endured the pain, gritting his teeth. After another moment or two, the pain surged through his entire body, to his hands and feet, but his heart felt quite comfortable. This demonstrated the excellence of the 'Solitary Yang Finger' of Reverend Yideng. An hour or so later, the pain was concentrated back in his stomach, and he threw up some blood. The blood glittered and looked redder than regular blood.

"Ah!" seeing him vomiting blood, Cheng Ying, Wushuang, and the others were shocked! Only Reverend Yideng looked delighted. "Shi di... [Younger Martial Brother]! Shi di!" he said softly, "even after your death you were still able to save your fellow man."

Yang Guo leaped up and declared with a voice full of emotion, "Today my life has been saved by the Divine Indian Monk, Reverend Yideng, and Auntie Guo."

"Is the poison completely eradicated from your body?" asked Wushuang gleefully.

"How could it be that quick?" he answered. "But now that we know the grass works, I will take a couple of strands every day until the poison is completely gone."

"But how would you know when your body is clean?" inquired Miss Lu further, "I mean, if the poison is completely neutralized and you continue taking the grass, wouldn't the grass poison you?"

"I can tell," he answered, "if the Passion Flower poison is still here and I ... I ... I think about love, my chest will hurt."

Guo Fu had been listening the whole time and suddenly quipped, "Yang Da Ge is thinking about Yang Da Sao, not you!" When she parried Gongsun Zhi's sword with her right

arm earlier, she was heeding Lu Wushuang's advice. At first she thought Wushuang was being nice to her; but afterwards realized Lu Wushuang did not know about the soft-hedgehog armor. Lu Wushuang must have wanted her to lose her right arm just as she'd chopped off Yang Guo's right arm. She'd kept her anger pent up for a long time and now she could not restrain herself.

"Fu'er! Shut up!" her mother rebuked harshly.

Hearing her, Lu Wushuang's face was flushed with anger, but Guo Fu wasn't finished yet, she continued, "Sixteen years from now, Sister-in-law will come back. Don't you get any weird ideas."

Wushuang unsheathed her willow-leaf-saber. "Wicked woman!" she snapped, pointing her saber to Guo Fu, "If not for you, Yang Da Ge wouldn't have to be separated from Yang Da Sao for sixteen years. Do you have the slightest idea how badly you have hurt Yang Da Ge?"

Guo Fu was about to counter when Huang Rong rebuked her with anger in her voice; "Fu'er! If you can't behave, go to the Peach Blossom Island. I'll forbid you to come back to Xiangyang." Guo Fu did not dare to open her mouth, but she still looked at Wushuang menacingly.

Yang Guo heaved a sigh and sorrowfully said, "It was an accident. Miss Guo did not intentionally want to hurt Long'er. Sister Lu, I forbid you to raise this incident again."

Hearing Yang Guo used the term "Sister Lu" to address her, while he called Guo Fu "Miss Guo", thus differentiating a good friend from an acquaintance, Wushuang was very pleased and sheathed her saber.

"Yang Shao Xia [Young Hero Yang] has eaten the 'Severed Intestine Grass'; but he did not experienced any bad side

effects. That proved the grass was indeed the antidote to the Passionless Flower's poison," Yideng said. "In my opinion, however, I think it will be better for Mr. Yang not to take the grass continually. Wait another seven days or so, and then you can have the second dose, even then, you should reduce the amount a little bit."

"Thank you for your priceless advice, Reverend." Yang Guo said, bowing.

The sun was already high in the sky. Huang Rong said, "We've been gone from Xiangyang for a while, and have not heard any news on the war situation. My mind keeps wandering back there, so I think we'd better go back today. Guo'er, I think you'd better come along, your Uncle Guo was really worried about you."

"Let me stay here and ... and wait for Long'er," he answered.

"You want to wait here sixteen years?" Guo Fu asked in disbelief.

"I don't know. I just feel like there is nowhere better," he answered.

"Very well then," decided Huang Rong, "It's all right if you want to wait here ten days to half a month. But if Sister Long does not come back, you'd better come to Xiangyang."

Yang Guo cast his glance toward the cliff but did not say anything.

Everybody bade Yang Guo farewell. Only Lu Wushuang seemed reluctant to leave. Of course Guo Fu saw that, and she could not help making a comment, "Hey, Lu Wushuang, do you want to stay here to accompany Brother Yang?"

Miss Lu blushed. "None of your business!" she snapped.

Suddenly Cheng Ying said, "Brother Yang has not fully recovered yet. Let Cousin and I stay here to accompany him for a few days."

Huang Rong knew, as sweet and gentle as she looked, in reality her younger martial sister had a very strong character. If her own daughter messed things up, she would not keep her peace. She looked sternly at Guo Fu, signaling her not to say another word. "Guo'er, I think it is a great idea to have Martial Sister and Miss Lu taking care of you," she said, "However, as soon as you are cured, I do hope you will come to Xiangyang, where my husband and I will wait for the three of you."

Yang Guo, Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang stood on the hill side, watching Yideng, Huang Rong and the others slowly fading away from their sight; disappearing among the trees. In the mean time, the fire that had been raging all night long had slowly died away.

"Sisters," said Yang Guo suddenly, "I would like to suggest something. I do hope you won't get offended."

"Who has ever been offended by you?" Wushuang asked.

Yang Guo smiled sadly, his voice trembling, "We have known each other for some time now; we love each other and we have even faced danger together. When I was a young boy I lived alone, with neither brothers nor sisters. My heart's desire is that we become sworn brother and sisters. What do you think?"

Cheng Ying was touched. She was sensitive and knew exactly what Yang Guo was thinking. She knew Yang Guo loved Xiao Longnu with all his heart. He had made that suggestion because he had to wait sixteen years, and because they would have to live together for several days. He wanted to avoid anything that could cause embarrassment or would

make them uncomfortable. Lu Wushuang put her head down, tears flowing from her eyes. "I would have never dreamed of being your sworn sister," she said softly. "We will be proud and honored to have a big brother like you."

After saying that, she walked toward a Passionless Flower nearby and picked three strands of the 'Severed Intestine Grass'. "Others become sworn brothers and sisters with incense sticks, here we use grass instead." She tried to make a joke and sound cheerful, but toward the end, her voice was hoarse. Before Yang Guo could respond, she immediately kneeled down on the ground. Yang Guo and Cheng Ying quickly knelt at either side of Miss Lu, and, just like the regular ceremony of becoming sworn brothers and sisters; they kowtowed eight times, and then bowed to each other in respect.

"Second Sister, Third Sister, what I hate most in this world is the Passionless Flower," Yang Guo said. "If that flower ever spreads outside this valley, it would be a real disaster for mankind. Therefore, let us make an oath to completely wipe out the Passionless Flower from the face of the earth. What do you think?"

"Your desire Big Brother is a very noble one," said Cheng Ying. "I am sure the Goddess of Mercy will bless you so that you will meet Sister-in-law much earlier."

Hearing his sister's words, Yang Guo's spirits rose. Immediately they went to the building complex ruins, trying to find some tools like machete or axe to cut down the poisonous flowers. They had to work very slowly. Not only there were lots of shrubs to cut, but if not careful, they would get pricked by the thorns. They finished cutting the shrubs after toiling for six whole days. Then they walked around the whole valley, making sure not a single shrub was spared. It

was because of their hard work that the world was free of the Passionless Flowers.

Early morning the next day, Wushuang took some more 'Severed Intestine Grass', went to her sworn brother and said, "Big Brother, it's time for you to take another dose of the grass."

After his first experience seven days ago, Yang Guo was not hesitant. Although the 'Severed Intestine Grass' was poisonous, it was effective against the poison in his body. He immediately sat down on the ground, exerted his internal energy to protect his heart and liver, and quickly ate the grass. This time the pain was not so severe. After about an hour or so he threw up some blood and the pain lessened almost immediately.

He stood up, stretched his arms and legs, and saw Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang's joyful countenance. "I am so lucky to have two very loving sworn sisters." he said to himself. "One is more than enough, now I have two. How can I repay their kindness?" He looked down, thinking hard. Then he thought, "Second Sister has had an excellent Master, and I am sure someday she will be an excellent martial artist. Not so with Third Sister."

Having had that thought, he said to Wushuang, "Third Sister, your master and mine were martial sisters. That makes us people of the same sect. The highest level of the Ancient Tomb Sect's martial arts was written in the 'Jade Maiden Manual'. Li Mochou's lifelong desire was to get hold of this manual, fortunately she did not get her wish right up to the day she died. While we have the opportunity, I'd like to teach you one or two arts from our sect. What do you say?"

Lu Wushuang was delighted, "Thank you Big Brother," she said. "Next time Guo Fu and I meet, she will not dare to pick a fight with me."

Yang Guo smiled faintly and immediately taught the theory of 'Jade Maiden Manual' to his sister, beginning from the elementary to the advanced. "You have to memorize the theory first, and later on ask Second Sister's help when it comes to training," explained the big brother. "This quiet Passionless Valley is a very suitable place to learn martial arts."

For a few days Wushuang used all her waking moments to memorize the theory. Since her background was also from the Ancient Tomb Sect, she did not have any difficulty understanding the elementary lessons. Very soon however, she arrived at the more difficult part of the lesson and started to have some trouble understanding the theory. Yang Guo advised her to just memorize the theory blindly; she would eventually understand the whole lesson. So Wushuang spent almost the whole month memorizing the entire 'Jade Maiden Manual'. In the mean time Yang Guo ate the 'Severed Intestine Grass' every seven days and his pain gradually lessened.

One morning, as usual Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang prepared their breakfast, and then waited for Yang Guo to come. After waiting for quite a while, Yang Guo did not come. They went to their big brother's cave, only to find some characters written on the ground at the cave's entrance. It said, "To part for a while, to be together forever. Brotherly love shines like the sun and the moon."

Both girls were shocked. "He ... finally he left us," Lu Wushuang said, running toward a hill and looked around. Cheng Ying followed not too far behind. All they could see were clouds on the mountain peaks. Miss Lu's heart was broken. She asked, with an uneven voice, "Second Sister ... where ... where did he go? Can we ... can we see him again?"

“Third Sister,” her older sister replied, “Do you see those clouds? They gathered together, then were blown away by the wind, to be gathered again somewhere else. We are just like those clouds. Now we gather, then we part. Why is your heart troubled?” Even though her mouth said those words, her heart was also full of sorrow.

Yang Guo had remained on the Broken Heart Cliff for about over a month and imparted the ‘Jade Maiden Manual’ to Lu Wushuang. During all this time, he did not find any more clues or news about the whereabouts of Xiao Longnu and knew that it would be no use to wait any longer. He gathered a bunch of the ‘Severed Intestine Grass’ and then left a parting a message in the sand before leaving the cliff. However, he had still not given up hope of seeing Xiao Longnu again, so he returned to mount Zhongnan and went back into the Ancient Tomb. But after seeing that the wedding garments were left untouched and were lying on the bed and floor, his heart was broken once again.

He left the mountain and roamed Jianghu for a few months. One day, he found himself near the city of Xiangyang. The burned wastelands that the Mongols had left was showing signs of human activity and it appeared that in the past months the Mongols were once again heading south.

He missed Guo Jing, but he did not want to see Guo Fu and thought to himself, “It’s been a long time since I parted with Brother Eagle, why don’t I go visit him?” He then made his way to the wild valley.

As he neared the home of Sword Demon Dugu Qiubai [Dugu Seeking-A-Loss], he gave a long whistle. He walked and whistled at the same time and not long after, he heard chirrup calls from the base of the mountain. He raised his head and saw the Divine Eagle below a large tree with a wolf in its claws. When the Divine Eagle saw Yang Guo, it released

the wolf and made its way to him. After managing to keep its life after facing the jaws of death, the wolf darted straight into the bushes without turning back.

Yang Guo hugged the eagle; both man and beast were extremely happy. They made their way back to the cave. In just a few months, Yang Guo had found himself slipping from life to death and from death back to life again, grief and joy both came and went, the trials and tribulations he had gone through, countless. It was a pity that the eagle could not speak; otherwise Yang Guo could tell it all the things that have been on his mind.

He stayed in the valley with the eagle as his companion for months. One day out of boredom, he made his way to the cliff where Dugu Qiubai buried his swords. He made his way to the top of the cliff and looked at the words underneath the decayed wooden sword:

“After the age of forty, I no longer relied on weaponry. Even bushes, trees, bamboo sticks or rocks can all be my sword. From then on, I achieved great progress and slowly reached the realm of overcoming the sword without a sword.”

Yang Guo thought to himself, “With the heavy iron sword, it can be said that I had no match under heaven’s skies; but from senior Dugu’s words, it appears that the wooden sword can defeat the heavy iron sword, and finally, no sword can defeat the wooden sword. Since Long’er said that we will only be able to see each other again in sixteen years time, with all these years to come, I might as well study the ways to defeat the heavy iron sword with the wooden sword and how to overcome a sword without a sword.”

He broke a branch and formed a sword with it and pondered, “The heavy iron sword is around seventy jin in weight, there are only two possibilities on how to overcome it with such a light and fragile wooden sword. One is through ingenuity of

the sword strokes, using speed to overcome the slow; the other is through overbearing internal energy, using strength to subdue the weak.”

From that day on, he trained his internal energy hard night and day and studied the art of the sword. Every time it rained; he went to the mountain torrents to fight the water in order to increase the power in his sword strokes.

Summer ended and autumn arrived, autumn went and winter came. Though Yang Guo trained with dedication, he made little progress with his internal energy and sword arts. However, he knew that his level of martial arts was already very high; to gain any sort of improvement from such a state was, in reality, a hard task to accomplish, so he wasn't troubled by it.

One day, it started to snow. The Divine Eagle called out with joy and leapt into the open. It spread its wings and created a strong gust of wind, blowing the snow away. Yang Guo had a thought, “There are no mountain torrents in the winter; practicing in the snow is a great alternative.”

He watched on as the gusts of wind created by the eagle became stronger and stronger; though the snow was heavy, not a flake landed on its body.

Yang Guo's interests were stirred. He picked up the wooden sword and he too went out into the snow. He used his sword with his left hand and swung his right sleeve at the same time. Whenever flakes of snow got close, either the wind from the wooden sword or the force from his right sleeve would repel it. He continued for a half a day and felt that the power in both his sword and sleeve seemed to have made some improvements.

It snowed for three days and Yang Guo practiced in the snow each day. On the afternoon of the third day, the snow

became even heavier. Yang Guo was in the middle of concentrating on attacking the snow when suddenly, the Divine Eagle swept its wings at him. Yang Guo was not prepared for this and was almost tripped by this attack. He leaped up urgently to avoid this attack but as soon as he did this, he felt coolness on his forehead, two flakes of snow had landed on it. He immediately understood, "That day on top of the cliff, Brother Eagle used its wings to fight me and helped me to make great improvements in my sword arts; today he is helping me to train my sword skills once again." He then extended his sword and thrust forward, a 'crack' sound was heard as the sword met the eagle's wings; the sword broke. The Divine Eagle did not continue its attack and instead it straightened up and chirruped with an impression of blame.

Yang Guo thought, "The only way to fight against your frightening strength with a wooden sword is to dodge, evade and wait for a chance to attack from afar." He made another wooden sword and once again, fought with the Divine Eagle in the snow. This time, he managed ten stances before the sword broke.

Training as hard as this without stop, Yang Guo felt that the Divine Eagle was like a strict teacher and showed no signs of letting up; he was touched by this but he was also ashamed of himself, "If I don't manage to learn the wooden sword, won't I have let down Brother Eagle's good intentions? Anyway, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity, how can I let it slip away?"

From then on, he thought about how to increase his internal energy, about how to evade and how to strike out with the sword even in his dreams. He trained rigorously and as a result, his thoughts of Xiao Longnu did not engulf his mind as it had in the previous months. The poison from the Passion Flower had now been cleansed from his body, his internal

energy had improved, he was in prime shape and he no longer had the haggard and distressed look of old.

It was now the anniversary of his parting with Xiao Longnu. Yang Guo said, "Brother Eagle, I want to visit the Passionless Valley; I'm going to have to leave you for a while." He then picked up his wooden sword and made his way out of the valley. The Divine Eagle followed. When they reached the fork in the road, Yang Guo bowed to the Divine Eagle and made his way on the road to the north. But to his surprise, the Divine Eagle tugged at his clothes and pulled him towards the south.

Yang Guo said, "Brother Eagle, I have something to do in the north, let us part now." But the eagle kept on pulling him south. Yang Guo was curious, "Brother Eagle has been very understanding; why is he being so stubborn now?" He could not get through to it with words and could only follow the Divine Eagle south. When the Divine Eagle saw that Yang Guo was following, it let go of Yang Guo's clothes: but as soon as Yang Guo turned around and tried to go north, it got hold of his clothes once again.

Yang Guo thought, "Brother Eagle is a divine creature, it must have a reason for wanting me to go to the south with him, I might as well go." He dropped his thoughts of returning to Passionless Valley and followed the eagle to the southeast.

After traveling over ten li, Yang Guo suddenly had a thought, "Could it be that Brother Eagle is leading me to the South Sea to allow me to see Long'er?" As soon as this thought finished, he was filled with excitement and started to take greater strides as he followed the Divine Eagle. Within a month, they had reached the coast of the South Sea.

He stood on a rock and gazed into the sea. He watched the waves of the sea as all manners of emotions filled his mind. After a while, he heard the thunderous sounds of the tides

that went on without stop. After spending part of his childhood on the Peach Blossom Island, he knew that the tides of the sea always kept its cycle; it would come at the first and seventh hour of the day. The sun was in the sky and it appeared that it was the time for the turn of the tide. The tide was getting louder and louder, sounding like the hoofs of ten thousand horses. The tide made a white line as it surged towards the coast; the force shown by the tide was greater than the hue and cries of thunder and lightning. Yang Guo could not believe that there existed such a force and after seeing this display, he couldn't stop his face from changing expression.

In the blink of an eye, the waves had reached him and were about to engulf him. Yang Guo leaped backwards, but suddenly he felt a great force pushing him from behind. It was the Divine Eagle using its wings to hit him. He was in midair and had no control over where he was going. With a splash he landed in the foamy waves. He felt a salty taste in his mouth as he swallowed two mouthfuls of seawater.

It was an extremely dangerous situation but luckily for him, he had spent a long time training in the mountain torrents and he immediately used the 'Thousand Pound Plummet', steadying himself on the rocks below the sea's surface. The bottom of the sea was a lot calmer than the turbulent waves on top. He gathered his thoughts and immediately knew what was happening, "Brother Eagle has led me here because he wants me to train my sword arts in the waves of the sea." He lifted his legs and leapt up to the surface of the sea and into the fierce winds, meeting the first of the waves head on. He pushed against the water with his left arm and leapt above the waves before quickly drawing a deep breath and returning to the bottom of the sea.

He repeated this until the tide calmed; by then he was so exhausted that his face had turned white. When the tide

came again that night, he took the wooden sword with him and leapt into the waves to again train his sword skills. However, unlike the mountain torrents where all he had to contend with was the force of the water heading in one direction, the forces of the waves came from everywhere; whenever he could not take it any longer, he would dive down to the sea bed to avoid the waves.

From then on, he trained twice a day and within a month, he felt his internal energy had made great improvements. When he used the wooden sword on dry land, he was able to produce a faint sound that sounded like sound of the tide. Whenever the Divine Eagle sparred with him, it started to avoid the sword and did not dare to meet it with its wings.

One day, Yang Guo was getting deeply engrossed in the sparring sessions and slashed the wooden sword with all his might. The Divine Eagle called out and leapt to the side. Yang Guo could not withdraw the force of his sword in time and it struck a tree. The wooden sword broke but the tree was cut in two.

Yang Guo held the broken sword's handle and thought, "This wooden sword is light and fragile, but it was still able to cut a tree; this is because of the internal energy in my hand. If in the future the tree breaks and the sword does not then I won't be too far off the divine skill of Senior Dugu."

Spring went and autumn came, the months flowed by. He trained his sword arts in the sea's waves night and day, whatever the weather. The sound produced by the wooden sword was getting louder and louder to the point where it was able to produce great volume of noise. After a few months, the sound from the wooden sword got quieter and quieter until no more noise came from it. Another few months passed and the sword produced sound again. This process of going from soft to loud and loud to soft repeated itself seven

times. Eventually, he was able to produce whatever sound he desired, loud or soft. By the time he reached this stage, he counted on his fingers and realized he had been by the sea for six years.

By this time, when Yang Guo trained in the sea's waves with the wooden sword in his hand, the wind generated by his sword could repel the waves and the Divine Eagle, with its frightening strength, could last not more than three stances of the wooden sword. At this point, he realized what the Sword Demon Dugu Qiubai must have felt all those years ago, "With a sword art such as this, who, on this earth, can stand up to it? No wonder Senior Dugu felt lonely and buried his sword away in the deep valley." He then thought, "If Brother Eagle hadn't witnessed how Senior Dugu trained his sword skills, how would I have been able to obtain such a divine skill? I call him Brother Eagle but in reality he is my kind master. When it comes to age, I don't know how old he is, I'm afraid that I could even call it Grandfather Eagle or Grandmaster Eagle."

During his training by the sea, Yang Guo would often ask the passengers on passing boats about a 'Divine Nun of the South Sea' [Nan Hai Shen Ni]. He has asked thousands of sailors and passengers but there was nothing. He knew that seeing Xiao Longnu before the sixteen years was up was going to be a near impossible task.

One dark, windy and rainy day, something stirred in Yang Guo's heart, he placed the wooden sword at his waist and covered himself with his tattered gown. The man and eagle made their way west and from then on, made their way back into Central Plains and roamed the southern region [Jiangnan].

End of Chapter 32.

Chapter 33 - Tales in the Night

Translated by Hugh (aka IcyFox)



As the three siblings of Guo Fu, Guo Xiang and Guo Polu sat warming themselves by the fire in an inn at the Fengling Ferry Crossing, they heard the other guests talking about the various gallant and righteous acts of the Eagle Hero. By and by, Guo Xiang's thoughts turned to distant things, and she began to harbor the hope of meeting this Great Eagle Hero.

The Song Emperor Li Zong celebrated the start of the year, the ninth year after Mengke (or Meng-ge) became the Mongolian Khan. In the early February spring on the tumultuous north bank of the Yellow River's Fenglingdu area, the donkeys and the horses called out mixed with the sounds of people and carts. The weather was cold then warm, the Yellow River had just thawed, but the north wind blew on this day and it started snowing, freezing the river's water. The water surface did not permit the movement of boats while the carts could not travel on the ice, forcing many visitors heading south to be stranded in the Fenglingdu area. They would be unable to continue their journeys. Although the Fenglingdu area has several inns, travelers arrived from the north continuously and in less than half a day, the inns were already fully occupied and the travelers who arrived later had no place to stay.

In the town the biggest inn was the "An Du Old Inn", occupying a location supposedly bringing good luck. In this inn the guest-quarters were spacious, all travelers who could not find any accommodations came here, and therefore the inn was particularly crowded. The innkeeper tried his best to arrange matters and so each room was packed with three to four individuals. Around twenty people who were waiting to get a room had to sit in a circle in the great hall. The inn assistants moved the furniture and lighted a fire. Outside, the north wind howled, the cold wind together with the snow managed to enter through a crack in a door, causing the fire to flicker continuously. It looked like the many visitors still

would not be able to continue their journey the next day and they were full of worries.

The sky became darker, the snow got heavier and heavier. Suddenly horses' hoofs were heard. Three riders anxiously rushed up and stopped at the inn entrance. In the hall an old guest frowned, saying, "Yet another visitor has come."

A female voice said, "Innkeeper, prepare two good spacious and clean rooms."

The innkeeper greeted her with a smile and said, "Sorry, the inn is already fully occupied. I really cannot prepare rooms for you."

That female said, "OK, then one room will do."

The innkeeper said, "Really sorry, honored guest, but the inn must also please others and now visitors really have filled the inn's rooms."

That female swung her horse whip, making a "Pa!" sound and scolded, "Rubbish! You run the inn, but will not prepare rooms, what kind of inn is this? Can't you ask someone to give way? I'll pay you more." After saying that, she then rushed into the hall.

The crowd saw this female figure become clearer and she looked around 30 years old, with a peach colored cheeks, elegant appearance and wearing an expensive blue colored fur-lined coat. The neckband revealed smooth skin; all the clothing looked quite expensive. Behind this young woman was a male and female of around fifteen or sixteen years old. The male had thick eyebrows and big eyes, and had a straightforward facial expression. The female was lively looking, elegant and beautiful. The two youths wore light green satin fur-lined coats. Around the young girl's neck hung a string of pearls, with each one around the size of a

small finger nail and showing a light halo. The many guests saw these three people's imposing manner and although they had chatted all day they stopped talking and stared silently at the three people.

The inn assistant bowed with a smile, saying, "Madam, look, these guests cannot find any accommodations. If you three do not mind the discomfort, I will let everybody occupy this space and keep warm by the fire, comfortably passing the night. If the river melts tomorrow, you can cross the river."

The young woman got impatient, but it looked like this was reality, so she frowned wordlessly. A middle-aged woman sitting near the fire said, "Madam, sit here, keep warm by the fire, get rid of the cold air then talk about this again." The beautiful woman said: "Good, many thanks to you." A male guest to the side of that middle-aged woman hurriedly moved away, giving up his place.

The three people sat down, and soon the inn assistant delivered their meals. The food was sumptuous, with chicken and pork, and a big pot of wine. That beautiful young woman's alcohol capacity was very good, having drunk bowl after bowl. The youth and the refined young girl also accompanied her in drinking; the three of them addressed each other as brother and sister. The youth looked older than the refined girl, but called her "elder sister".

The people sat in a circle around the fire, listening to the wind whistling outside, none feeling sleepy at the moment.

A man with a Shanxi accent said, "This weather really is unfavorable; it changes rapidly. God doesn't allow man to have even one good day."

A short person with a Hubei accent said, "You can't blame Heaven and Earth; we have in here a fire to keep warm, food to eat, what else do you want? If you have lived in the

besieged city of Xiangyang, even the world's most bitter places will seem a cozy nest."

That beautiful young woman upon hearing "besieged city of Xiangyang ", exchanged glances with her brother and sister.

A visitor with a Guangdong accent asked, "Excuse me, elderly friend, that besieged city of Xiangyang - how is life there?"

The Hubei visitor said, "The Mongolians' cruelty, of which all of you know, need not be mentioned. The year the Mongolians' 100,000-strong army attacked Xiangyang fiercely, the garrison was controlled by Governor Lu, a stupid and incompetent person. Fortunately the heroic couple Mr. and Mrs. Guo bravely repelled the enemy forces..." The young woman, upon hearing "heroic couple Mr. and Mrs. Guo", started paying attention. Listening to that Hubei visitor continue, "Xiangyang City's hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians also defended the city with their lives and none cowered from their duty. A small-time merchant like me, though only able to move earth and stones, also helped to defend the city. This old arrow scar on my face was caused by a Mongolian's arrow." The people looked at his face simultaneously, saw that under his left eye there really was a teacup-size arrow scar and could not help but respect him.

That Guangdong guest said, "Our great Song has much land and many people; if everybody acts like the old friend here, even if the Mongolians were ten times fiercer, they couldn't conquer our lands."

The Hubei man said, "Yes. Look, the Mongolian army has been attacking Xiangyang for more than ten years, but can't take the city, while other cities fall easily. I heard dozens of countries in the western region got destroyed by the Mongolians, while our Xiangyang, throughout, stood erect like a mountain. The Mongolian prince Khubilai Khan

personally directed the combat, but also could not overcome our Xiangyang people." After saying that, he greatly felt satisfied.

The Guangdong guest said: "The common people will fight the Mongolians with their lives; if the Mongolians come to Guangdong, our Guangdong men will also fight them with all our might."

The Hubei man said, "Even if we don't go all out with the Mongolians, we will still die. The Mongolians cannot take Xiangyang, so they seized the Han people outside the city, tied them up next to each other and beheaded them near the city. Even some four or five year-old or six or seven year-old children were tied up, then pulled by horses in circles under the city wall, and usually in less than half a circle, the children would die. We could hear the children crying loudly from the top of the city wall, and it hurts the heart greatly. The Mongolians use such cruel methods, trying to frighten us into surrendering, but the more vicious they are, the harder we defend the city. That year all of Xiangyang's grain was eaten, the water supply used up, we even had to drink the water condensed on tree bark, but the Mongolians could never force their way in. Afterwards the Mongolians gave up and withdrew the army."

The Guangdong man said, "After more than ten years fighting, if Xiangyang didn't persevere unyieldingly, I fear half of the great Song Empire would have already disappeared."

Many people asked about Xiangyang's defense situation, and the Hubei man talked dramatically, praising Guo Jing and Huang Rong like deities, so the people called out their approval unceasingly.

A visitor with a Sichuan accent suddenly sighed, "Actually good officials who can defend a city are numerous, but the

Imperial Court is treacherous, often allowing disloyal subjects to enjoy riches and honor, while the loyal ministers die unjustly. The previous dynasty's General Yue need not be mentioned. For instance, our Sichuan has several loyal ministers who were killed by the Imperial Court."

The Hubei man said, "Who were they? I must ask." The Sichuan man said, "The Mongolians attacked Sichuan for more than 10 years and we all depended on Marshal Yu to defend us. The entire Sichuan population treated him like a living Buddha. Who knew that the Emperor believed the words of his disloyal subject Ding Daquan who said Marshal Yu was too powerful and dangerous. The emperor bestowed poisoned wine upon him and compelled him to commit suicide; replacing him with an incompetent and deceitful jerk as Marshal. Then when the Mongolians attacked again, the northern Sichuan province could not defend itself. The soldiers were Marshal Yu's former subordinates, so everyone fought to the death. But the new Marshal could only polish up his superiors so as soon as we went to war, he deployed the troops hopelessly and naturally we could not defend ourselves. Ding Daquan and Chen Dafang, the deceitful duo, both shielded that useless Marshal, and instead maligned the brave and unyielding General Wang Weizhong. They accused him of collaborating with the enemy, resulting in his entire family in Beijing being captured and General Wang beheaded." Saying this, his voice had a sobbing note, and many people sighed simultaneously.

The Guangdong visitor said indignantly, "Our country's affairs are all thrown into disarray by these disloyal subjects. I heard the Imperial Court has three dogs, so this disloyal subject Ding Daquan must be one of them."

A fair youth was listening silently, but he said, "Correct, the Imperial Court's disloyal subjects Ding Daquan, Chen Dafang and Hu Dachang are the top three dogs. The Linan people

added a dot to their 'Da' character, changing them to Ding Qianquan, Chen Quanfang and Hu Quanchang." (Playing with the Chinese characters) Hearing this, the group of people laughed heartily.

The Sichuan man said, "From your voice, you must be from the capital Linan."

The youth said, "Exactly."

The Sichuan man said, "Then have you heard of the matter concerning General Wang Weizhong's punishment?"

The youth said, "I saw with my own eyes. Before dying General Wang's manner did not change and he fiercely shouted that Ding Daquan and Chen Dafang will bring disaster on the nation and the people. But moreover there is also a different matter." The numerous people asked, "What different matter?"

The youth said, "General Wang's death was caused by Chen Dafang's plotting. When General Wang was tied up and he was being moved to the execution ground, he shouted loudly in the street, saying that he will definitely voice his grievances to the Jade Emperor (the Emperor of Heaven). The third day after General Wang's death, that Chen Dafang was killed in his own home; his severed head was actually displayed above the Linan east gate's bell tower, suspended on a long bamboo pole. Neither apes nor monkeys could reach this place, let alone a person; if it wasn't the Jade Emperor, then who could have done it?" Many people expressed admiration. The youth said, "This matter is known throughout Linan and was not made up by me. If you people go to Linan, you will know as soon as you ask."

The Sichuan man said, "This brother's story is indeed good. However the one who killed Chen Dafang, certainly wasn't a deity or god, but actually was a great hero."

The youth shook his head and said, "That Chen Dafang was a high official in the Imperial Court and had many soldiers. He was guarded closely; how could the average man kill him? Also, to hang this disloyal subject's severed head above the bell tower, one must have wings; only then can one have that ability."

The Sichuan man said, "A chivalrous hero with such extraordinary abilities must still exist in the world after all. But if I didn't witness this myself, I might also find it unbelievable."

The youth curiously asked, "You saw how he hung up Chen Dafang's severed head on the high bamboo pole with your own eyes? How did you see that?"

The Sichuan man hesitated for a while and said, "General Wang Weizhong has a son; when General Wang was arrested the son escaped outside Linan. The Imperial Court's disloyal subjects wanted to nip the problem in the bud, so they sent the army to pursue and capture him. General Wang's son was also a military officer; although he has some martial arts, he actually was overwhelmed by sheer numbers and knew that he was about to be caught. But a savior came and empty-handedly thrashed dozens of soldiers soundly. Young General Wang then told his savior how his father fought bravely for the country but was framed by the disloyal subjects. That chivalrous hero rushed the same night to Linan, wanting to rescue General Wang, but was late by two days and General Wang was already dead. That chivalrous hero swelled with anger and that very evening he severed Chen Dafang's head. Although that bell tower is out of reach of apes and monkeys, that chivalrous hero had only to jump gently and reached it in one attempt."

The Guangdong man asked, "Who is this hero? What's his appearance like?"

The Sichuan man said, "I did not know this hero's name, I only saw that he was short a right arm, his facial expression...his facial expression was also very unusual. He rode a horse and led another horse with a huge strange-looking bird riding on it..." He had not finished talking when a man with a straightforward facial expression loudly said, "Correct! This must be the world-famous 'Eagle Hero'!"

The Sichuan person asked, "He is called the 'Eagle Hero'?"

The other man said, "This chivalrous hero valiantly upholds justice, defends the good against evil, but is never willing to reveal his name. Our friends in Jianghu (the pugilistic world) always see him and a queer bird together, so they gave him the nickname the "Chivalrous Eagle Hero" (Shen Diao Da Xia). He said he was not fit to be called a "Chivalrous Hero" (da xia), so they only called him the "Eagle Hero". But based on his actions, what's wrong with calling him "Chivalrous Hero"? If he isn't a hero, then who is?"

The beautiful young woman suddenly said, "You are a chivalrous hero, I am also a chivalrous hero, humph, there are rather too many chivalrous heroes."

That Sichuan person imposingly said, "Madam said that? Although I don't understand Jianghu matters, the Eagle Hero rushed Linan from Jiangxi for four consecutive days and nights, without sleeping or resting, in order to save the life of General Wang. He didn't even know General Wang, but because of the General's utter loyalty in serving the country and being framed by the disloyal traitor, he acted boldly without regard for his own safety. He braved much danger to seek justice for General Wang's orphan, so should you call him a chivalrous hero?"

The young woman made a 'humph' sound and was about to argue, but the refined young girl beside her said, "Elder sister, judging from what this gentleman did, of course one

should call him a "Chivalrous Hero". Her words were clear; upon hearing this, nobody else could say anything as pleasant to hear.

The young woman said, "What do you know?" Turning her head to that Sichuan man, she said, "How do you know it so well? Is this not hearsay? In Jianghu news, around 90% is not accurate."

That Sichuan person hesitated for a while before saying, "My surname is Wang; General Wang Weizhong was my father. My life was saved by the Eagle Hero. I am a fugitive and the Imperial Court has issued a warrant for my arrest, and wants my head. But this involves my savior's reputation, so I do not dare fear death and keep this matter from coming to light."

The people were shocked to hear him say that. The Guangdong man curled his thumb upwards, saying "Young General Wang, you are a good man. Anyone who dares to inform the government authorities of your whereabouts may have a white knife entering him, a red knife coming out." Many people loudly praised this. The beautiful woman heard him say this and could not argue.

The refined young girl looked at the flickering fire and was lost in thought, gently mumbling, "Eagle Hero, Eagle Hero... .." Turning her head to young General Wang, she said, "Uncle Wang, the Eagle Hero has such excellent martial arts, how could he lose an arm?" The beautiful woman's face changed greatly, the lips moved slightly, wanting to speak, but she controlled the impulse.

Young General Wang shook his head saying, "I didn't even get to ask his name, how could I ask about his life story?"

The beautiful young woman made a 'humph' sound, saying "Of course you don't know."

The Linan youth said, "The Eagle Hero killed the traitor which young General Wang witnessed with his own eyes, then naturally it was not the deities who did it. But that traitor Ding Daquan's face turned green in one night, so it must be due to heaven's punishment."

The Guangdong man said, "How did his face turn green in one night? This is really strange."

The Linan youth said, "Formerly the people of Linan called Ding Daquan as Ding Qianquan, but now he is called "Ding Qingpi" (Ding Green Skin). His originally fair skin suddenly turned green in a night, and it didn't go away. All the wise doctors were not able to treat him. I heard the Emperor also once asked about it but that disloyal official said that he wholeheartedly served the Emperor and his anxiety over national affairs caused him to lose much sleep, so his complexion turned green. But in Linan everyone said this deceitful scoundrel brings disasters on the nation and the people, so the Jade Emperor turned his face green."

The Guangdong man smiled shaking his head, saying, "Indeed this is very strange."

The man with the straightforward face suddenly laughed loudly, patted his leg and called out, "This was also the work of the Eagle Hero, heh-heh, this makes me happy." People quickly asked, "What, the Eagle Hero did this too?" That guy only laughed and said, "Ha-ha, this is funny." The Guangdong guest desired to know the details and ordered the servant to bring two cattles of wine and invited that guy to drink.

He drank a big bowl of wine and was satisfied and happy, loudly saying, "This matter is not a cock and bull story; I also have a bit of credit. That evening the Eagle Hero suddenly arrived in Linan; he called me to lead some followers and we tied up the Linan Qian Tang Xian Yamen (Something like a District Court) officers, removed their clothes and let us play

the roles of the officers. Everybody was pleasantly surprised, as we did not know why the Eagle Hero gave such instructions, but we wanted to play along and so we acted accordingly. Soon the Eagle Hero arrived at the Qian Tang Xian Yamen, he put on the magistrate's costume, sat the hall, banged the wooden block and shouted, 'Bring that scum Ding Daquan here!'" Saying this, his saliva splattered and he drank a big mouthful of wine.

The Guangdong guest said, "Friend what did you work as in Linan at that time?"

The man returned his gaze and said, "What job? I drank a lot, ate a lot, had much money but I was a businessman without capital." (Hinting he was involved in shady activities.) The Guangdong visitor was startled and did not dare ask again.

The man also said, "At that time when I heard ' Ding Daquan ', I got a shock, carefully thinking 'The dog Ding Daquan is currently the Prime Minister, how did the Eagle Hero bring him here?' The Eagle Hero hit the wooden block again, and then two burly men actually brought a man dressed in official court dress before him. A year earlier Ding Daquan went to a Taoist temple to burn incense and obtain blessings and I saw him outside the temple. Now when I looked again, it was really Ding Daquan. His whole body trembled, not knowing whether to kneel or not. Our brothers kicked his knees, he fell over and knelt down, ha-ha, the Eagle Hero asked, 'Ding Daquan, are you aware of the charges against you?' Ding Daquan said 'I don't know.' The Eagle Hero shouted, 'You engage in corrupt practices for your own personal gain, caused the deaths of loyal men, cruelly harm the common people, collaborate with the enemy who invade the country; all these are heinous crimes - quickly, confess now!' Ding Daquan said, 'Who are you? You insult the Prime Minister; do you not know the law?' The Eagle Hero said, 'Do YOU not know the law? Officers, hit him forty times then we shall talk

again!' Everybody already hated this scum, so this time we hit doubly hard, but we only hit this scoundrel several times before he begged for mercy again and again. The Eagle Hero asked several questions and he answered willingly, not daring to act stubbornly. The Eagle Hero brought a pen and paper and demanded he write a confession. He hesitated slightly so the Eagle Hero commanded us to hit his buttocks and slap his mouth."

The refined young girl smiled and said quietly, "Interesting!"

The man drank another huge mouthful of wine, saying with a smile, "Yes. This is very interesting. That Ding Daquan had never been hit before so he had no choice but to write the confession, but he suffered from the beatings so he wrote extremely slowly. The Eagle Hero had to urge him on repeatedly but he was not willing to write any faster. Soon the Sun rose, outside the Yamen the sounds of people got louder, and a large troop of soldiers arrived, probably because the matter had leaked out. The Eagle Hero got angry and shouted, 'Behead him!' and cast a glance at me. I knew the Eagle Hero would not easily take someone's life, so I drew out my broad sword and brushed Ding Daquan's neck, then when I chopped the sword down, I turned it in midair, chopping his neck with the flat of the sword. But this scared the living daylights out of Ding Daquan, causing his complexion to turn green suddenly and he fainted. The Eagle Hero laughed heartily, calling us to put back the Yamen's officer's clothes and sneak off through the side door and return home. Afterwards he went out to the soldiers and so we never fought with them, and everybody withdrew safely. I heard the following day the Eagle Hero personally sneaked into the Imperial Palace, and handed Ding Daquan's confession to the Emperor. But we do not know how, but that Ding Daquan managed to sweet talk the Emperor into believing him and allowing him to continue as Prime Minister."

Young General Wang sighed, "If the Emperor was not stupid, then disloyal subjects could not do evil. When Qin Hui was gone, Han Tuo Zhou came; when Han Tuo Zhou has gone, Shi Miyuan came; now Shi Miyuan has gone, Ding Daquan comes. We saw Jia Sidao in power and saw how this brought disaster upon the nation and the people. Oh, since the disloyal subjects are numerous, our great Song Empire may not last long."

The other man said, "Only if we ask the Eagle Hero to be Prime Minister can we repel the Mongolians and restore peace throughout the country."

The beautiful woman said, "Humph is he qualified to be the Prime Minister?"

The man got angry, "If he's not are you?"

The young woman became furious and shouted, "Who the hell are you; how dare you be impolite to me?"

The guy picked an iron rod from the fire; she grabbed a few sticks of firewood and struck his rod. The guy's arm trembled and he felt half his body go numb so he let go of the hot rod, which fell onto the floor causing sparks from the fire to fly and scorch strands of his beard. People called out in alarm. Although the man is hot-tempered, he tasted her martial arts, suffered a loss and did not dare act rashly. He only stroked his burnt beard, not even wanting to drink the wine anymore.

The refined young girl said, "Others have been talking about the Eagle Hero and it was all going fine, why do you not like to hear it?" Turning her head to the man she gave a sweet smile, saying "Uncle, please do not be offended." That man was originally filled with anger, but seeing her sweet smile, his anger dissipated immediately and his large mouth also smiled; he wanted to say something polite but did not know what to say.

The young girl said, "Uncle, how did you get to know the Eagle Hero?" The man looked at the young woman, hesitated and did not speak. The young girl said, "Just agree not to offend my elder sister and that will do. How old is the Eagle Hero? Are his looks good?" She did not wait for the man to reply and turned her head to the woman saying, "Elder sister, I wonder how his Divine Eagle compares with our pair of eagles?"

The young woman said, "Compare with our pair of eagles? In all this world, which eagle or eagles can hold a candle to our pair of eagles?"

The young girl said, "Not necessarily true. Father often said, 'A person who studies military theories must know that superior parties always exist and so one cannot be complacent.' If that applies to humans, then it applies to our eagles too, so more magnificent birds should exist."

The young woman said "At your young age, what do you understand? When we went out, our parents told you to listen to me, have you not remembered?"

The young girl said with a smile, "That also depends on whether what you say is right. Younger brother am I right or is elder sister right?"

The youth next to her is big and sturdy, but actually looked very naive, so he hesitated for a while then said, "I don't know. Father said we should listen to elder sister, and told you not to talk back to elder sister."

The young woman looked very pleased and said, "Isn't that so?"

The young girl saw that her younger brother was helping her elder sister, but she was not angry and said with a smile, "You don't understand anything either." Turning her head to the

straightforward man she said, "Uncle, continue the Eagle Hero's story, please."

The man said, "OK, since the lady wants to hear, I shall speak; although I, whose surname is Song, have poor skills, I am an honest man. What I say is true and definitely doesn't contain half a word of lies, if the lady does not believe me, then there's no need to listen."

The young girl took the wine pot and poured out a bowl of wine for him, then said with a smile, "Why would I not believe you? Come on, quickly start talking!" She also called out, "Waiter, bring ten catties of wine again and cut 20 catties of beef, my elder sister requests all of you to drink merrily and drive out the cold air." The servant repeatedly agreed and relayed the order. The many travelers smiled from ear to ear, expressing their gratitude with one voice. Before long, three waiters brought the wine and meat.

The young woman calmly said "Even if I wanted to provide a treat, I would not invite people who utter rubbish. Waiter, the bill for the wine and meat money should not be charged to my account."

The servant gawked, looked from the young woman to the young girl, not knowing what to do. The young girl took off a golden hairpin from her hair and gave it to the servant, saying, "This hairpin is made of real gold, it's worth several taels (a unit of currency) of silver. Take it away and exchange it for money. And bring another ten catties of wine and 20 catties of mutton."

The young woman got angry, "Younger sister, must you be spiteful with me? Even a pearl on this hairpin alone is worth more than 100 taels of silver; you bothered and begged Uncle Zhu for it, but now you casually use it to treat people to a drink. When you return to Xiangyang, if Mother asks about it how will you answer?"

The young girl stuck out her tongue and said with a smile, "I shall say it fell on the road, and I could not find it."

The woman said "I will not lie for you."

The young girl used her chopsticks to grasp a piece of beef and put it in her mouth. She then said, "After all, we have already eaten, how can I take it back now? Everybody, please eat, there is no need to be polite."

The people saw the two arguing and all found it interesting, but they liked the young girl's naïve character, so even those who did not drink carried the liquor bowls to those who drank the wine, helping the young girl secretly. The young woman spitefully closed her eyes and used her hands to cover her ears.

The young girl said with a smile, "Uncle Song, my elder sister is sleeping, it's OK if you speak loudly; you won't wake her." The young woman opened her eyes widely, getting angry, "When did I sleep?" The young girl then said, "That's even better, even if we talk loudly we won't disturb you."

The young woman said loudly, "Xiang'er, let me tell you, if you anger me, I will not allow you to follow us around tomorrow." The young girl said, "It's alright, I can travel together with Younger brother." The woman said "Younger brother will come with me." The young girl said, "Younger brother, say, who will you follow?"

The youth was caught in a fix, if he helped his big sister, his other sister would be upset, if he helped his other sister, his big sister would be angry, so he said, "Mother said, the three of us must always travel together and not be separated."

The young woman stared at her younger sister and snapped, "If I had known that you would become so disobedient, I

would not have been anxious to find you back when you got kidnapped by the thugs when you were small."

The young girl heard her say that, causing her heart to soften, so she hugged the young woman's shoulders, begging, "Good elder sister, please don't be angry, it's my fault." The young woman was angry and paid no attention to her. The young girl then said, "If you don't smile, I will tickle you." That young woman turned her head away instead. The young girl suddenly extended her right hand and poked at the young woman's armpit from behind. The young woman did not counter the move but swept her left hand backwards. The young girl used her left hand to block and her right hand continued to move forwards. The young woman sank her right elbow slightly, pressing down on her sister's arm. The young girl then circled her palm and avoided the elbow, executing the graceful move beautifully. In that short moment, the two people exchanged seven or eight moves, all originating from the ingenious "Subtle Hand Arresting Technique". Although the young girl did not manage to tickle her elder sister's armpit, the young woman also could not catch her sister's arm.

Suddenly a person in a corner softly said, "Good skills!" Both sisters stopped and looked at that corner and saw a person curled up into a ball, the head buried between the knees sleeping soundly. The sisters sat on a pile of firewood looking at him resting in such a position without moving at all. The other people were unable to see his face, so it looked like this comment was not made by him.

The youth said, "Big sister, elder sister, Father warned us not to reveal our martial arts casually."

The young girl smiled, "Young old man, you are right." She turned her head to the straightforward man and said, "Uncle

Song, sorry, we sisters were busy arguing and forgot to listen to your story, please continue."

The man named Song said, "I'm not spinning a yarn, this is the absolute truth and nothing but the truth."

The young girl said, "Uncle Song, what you say is naturally true."

The man drank the wine, saying with a smile, "I've consumed much of the lady's wine and meat, how can I not tell all? If I had not lost all my money last night due to three confounded dice, I would really repay the lady. You keep addressing me as Uncle, how can I disappoint you? How did I get to know the Eagle Hero? It was similar to young General Wang; it was also the Eagle Hero who saved my life. But this time he actually didn't use his Wugong (martial arts), he used money to buy my life back." The young girl said with a smile, "Well, this is curious; he used money to buy your life? Eh, how much is it worth?"

That man laughed aloud and said, "My worthless body actually cost more than beef and pork because the Eagle Hero unexpectedly forked out 2,000 taels of silver for it. More than five years ago, I tried to uphold justice in Shandong and I killed a crook. Since murder carries the death penalty, I was sentenced to death so there was nothing for me to say. Who knew several days later, the Licheng county magistrate interrogated the local evil tyrant and later brought me forward for a torture session accusing me of crimes that local tyrant committed, murder, extortion, rape; all the blame was pushed onto me and the tyrant was acquitted. Afterwards the Prison Warden told me that the tyrant bribed the County Magistrate with 1,000 taels of silver, so the County Magistrate transferred all his capital charges to me. A capital offence is punished with death; ten capital offences were also punished with death, so I was made a scapegoat. When I

heard such injustice, I shouted loudly in my cell, scolding the corrupt official, but what use was that?"

"After several days, the corrupt official called for a retrial and that local tyrant was also kneeling next to me. I shouted, 'You corrupted dog, you accepted bribes and distorted justice, you will not have a peaceful death!' That corrupt official grinned, 'Song Wu, you do not have to speak thus, I investigated closely and found that you were sentenced unjustly. That crook was not killed by you but by this tyrant!' After saying that, he ordered the Yamen attendants to hit him hard, and used the bamboo torture method (something like squeezing the fingers between bamboo sticks) on him, forcing him to confess that he killed that crook and pushed the blame on me. I wasn't able to figure this out; that crook was obviously killed by me, how could this charge be transferred to someone else?"

The young girl heard this and smiled, saying, "This magistrate must be really blind."

Song Wu said, "He was definitely not blind; when I got home, my mother told me after I was sentenced to death, my mother bitterly wept daily on the street. One day she happened to meet the Eagle Hero passing through who asked her what was wrong. The Eagle Hero asked around and discovered the truth; he said he had a matter at hand and didn't have the time to find this corrupt official to settle the score, so he gave my mother 2,000 taels of silver to buy my life. After three months, everyone in the town said the County Magistrate, late one night, was robbed of 4,000 taels of silver and got into a fit of anger. He was so mad he coughed up blood ever since. I knew this surely must be the Eagle Hero's doing, so I didn't dare continue living there and moved to Jiangnan. After more than a year, some people told me, a great master with a missing arm was by the seashore with a big queer bird and he was looking blankly into the sea,

and had been doing so for the past few days. I hastily hurried up to him and kowtowed to him as an expression of gratitude."

The young woman suddenly said, "Thank him for what? He paid 2,000 taels of silver but stole 4,000 taels of silver; so he made a profit of 2,000 taels of silver. How could this Yang scum do business in such an unscrupulous manner?" The young girl said, "Yang? The Eagle Hero is named Yang?" The young woman said, "I don't know, I didn't say his name is Yang." The young girl said, "I clearly heard you say so." The woman said, "Surely you heard wrongly."

The young girl said, "OK. I won't argue with you. Even if the Eagle Hero gained 2,000 taels of silver, it must also have been used for helping the poor and needy people. He is a generous and chivalrous hero, how would he use the money for his own personal gain?" Many people cheered with one voice, all saying, "The lady is right!"

The young girl asked, "Uncle Song, why did the Eagle Hero stare at the sea? Is he waiting for someone?" Song Wu shook his head, "I don't know, I didn't dare to ask about this."

The young girl took up two pieces of firewood and threw them into the fire, looking at the dark flame turn bright red, gently saying, "Although Eagle Hero is ever eager to help the distressed; perhaps he actually has a problem of his own? Otherwise why does he always stare at the sea?"

A middle-aged woman sitting in a western corner suddenly said, "I have a younger female cousin who has seen the Eagle Hero before. She also once saw the Eagle Hero blankly looking at the sea with a strange expression, and so she personally asked him about it. The Eagle Hero replied, 'My beloved wife is at the other end of the sea, so we can't meet.'" The people all said "Ohh" at the same time.

The refined young girl said, "So he has a wife, why did she end up at the other end of the sea? He has such excellent abilities, why doesn't he cross the sea to look for her?"

The middle-aged woman said, "My younger female cousin also asked him that. He said, "The Sea is so vast, I don't know how we can meet."

The young girl gently sighed, "I expected that such a character would have such a personality, so it's actually true." She also asked, "Is your younger female cousin very pretty? In her heart she secretly likes the Eagle Hero, is it not so?"

The beautiful young woman shouted clearly, "Younger sister, are you fantasizing again?"

The middle-aged woman said, "My younger female cousin may be considered to be beautiful. The Eagle Hero killed her father in order to save her mother. Whether or not my younger female cousin secretly liked the Eagle Hero, nobody knows. She has since married an honest farmer. The Eagle Hero gave her a great sum of money and now her life is pretty good."

The young girl said, "The Eagle Hero killed her father in order to save her mother? How strange!"

The beautiful woman said "This person has a very strange temperament, when he's good he saves lives, when he's wicked he murders people. Yes, he was like that since he was young."

That young girl curiously asked "He was like that since he was young? How do you know?"

The woman said, "I just know."

The young girl persistently asked about the matter but the young woman refused to say. The young girl said, "Fine, since you won't say, then I don't want to hear. Even if you did say, I may not believe you." She turned her head to the middle-aged woman and said, "Madam, please tell me about your younger female cousin's story."

The woman said, "Alright. My younger female cousin and I have an age gap of seventeen years, and her mother is my aunt..." The young girl said with a smile, "And her father is your uncle." That woman replied with a smile, "Oh, I'm droning non-stop again, causing the lady to be impatient. My uncle is from Henan; in that year the Mongolians invaded our lands and captured my uncle to work as a slave. My aunt led my cousin, begging for food along the way, and went to Shandong from Henan. Then they went to Shanxi from Shandong, looking for my uncle's whereabouts."

Young General Wang sighed, "Traveling thousands of li to find her husband; that is really rare."

The woman said, "But because my aunt and my cousin's appearance is good, traveling on the road is doubly hard. The two of them spread their faces with black mud to prevent evil men from seeing colour and coming up with ideas..." (Meaning lusting after them...as if you didn't know!)

The young girl said, "Seeing colour and coming up with ideas?" Half of the people sitting around the fire started laughing.

The beautiful young woman hurriedly said, "Younger sister, if you don't understand then don't talk nonsense, you're a big lady, and people will laugh at you."

The young girl muttered, "I don't understand, that's why I ask; if I understood, why would I ask?"

The middle-aged woman smiled and said, "These are awful words, if the lady doesn't understand it's better for her. Mmm, my aunt and cousin searched for four years and heaven helped them; they finally found my uncle in Hubei, serving as a Mongolian official's slave. This official is very evil. When my aunt saw my uncle, he had just massaged the Mongolian official's left leg. My aunt was extremely grieved and begged the Mongolian official to allow him to return home. The Mongolian official was not willing to agree, saying he bought this lackey for 100 taels of silver, so unless my aunt has 500 taels of silver to redeem his freedom, the official would rather kill him than set him free. My aunt didn't even have 50 taels of silver, how could she find 500 taels of silver? She thought for a long time, finally deciding not to be concerned about face and so she and her daughter sold their flesh..."

Again the young lady did not understand, but her previous question caused much laughter, so now she did not dare to ask again, and continued to listen to the woman. The woman said, "After several years like this, the mother and daughter only had a little savings, but to raise 500 taels of silver, was easier said than done. Fortunately their clients knew about their plight, so they often paid more than necessary. The mother and daughter suffered great humiliation, and on this New Year's Eve, they finally raised the 500 taels of silver. They went to the Mongolian official's residence, thinking that the whole family can finally be reunited and have a happy new year."

The young girl heard this and was happy for the mother and daughter. Then she heard the woman say, "That Mongolian official received the 500 taels of silver, and then called my uncle to come out, letting the family meet. My uncle's family kowtowed (kneel and bow) to that Mongolian official and bade him farewell. Who knew that when the Mongolian official saw my cousin, he suddenly had evil intentions,

saying, 'Good, you are here to redeem this slave, nothing could be better, now hand over 500 taels of silver!' My aunt was shocked, she had already given the Mongolian official 500 taels of silver, and how could she hand over the money again? The Mongolian official's face changed, shouting, 'I am a high Mongolian official, would I cheat for my slave's money?' My aunt was afraid and sad, so she immediately cried loudly in the main hall, and then that Mongolian official said, "Fine. Today is New Year's Eve, I shall show mercy and let your family be reunited, but I fear when this lackey is gone he will not return, so you must leave your girl behind. 'My aunt knew he harbored evil intentions; how would she be willing to comply? That Mongolian official shouted for his attendants who then threw my uncle and aunt out of his office."

"My aunt wasn't willing to give up her daughter and shouted in front of the Mongolian official's office. The common people knew perfectly well that she has been wronged, but Hubei was not part of the great Song territory. Mongolian soldiers killed the Han people like trampling on ants, so who dared to say a word about fairness? But my uncle said, 'Since the Mongolian official has taken a liking for our girl, that is a fortune others cannot have, so why do you cry?' He actually behaved like a slave since he has been a lackey for a long time. He then asked where that 500 taels of silver came from. In the beginning my aunt was not willing to say, but was questioned persistently and she finally said it. My uncle got angry, saying my aunt had ruined his reputation by not following the traditional woman's ethics. He became depressed, then did such a despicable act as to write a divorce paper immediately and has since divorced my aunt." The people sighed with one voice; all saying her aunt really has had such an unfortunate life.

The middle-aged woman said, "My aunt toiled through untold hardships for seven or eight years but reached such a

wretched state that she did not want to live. Then she went to the woods and loosened her belt to hang herself. But heaven is just and fair; just then the Eagle Hero passed by and rescued her. He found out the whole story and his face flushed with anger. That very evening he entered into the Mongolian official's office and saw the Mongolian official trying to coerce my cousin and my uncle unexpectedly urging my cousin to submit. He was saying that since she has been in that kind of job all these years, she isn't a decent girl anymore and didn't have to respect her chastity. The Eagle Hero killed my uncle with one punch and gripped that Mongolian official and threw him into the Huaihe River, thus saving my cousin. He said my aunt sold her flesh to save her husband so she deserved much more respect than the common chaste ladies. He also said the people he hates most are ungrateful people, so he would never spare people like my uncle."

The young girl heard this and started to day-dream, casually lifting the wine bowl and drank a big mouthful then gently said, "So many of you were able to meet the Eagle Hero, but I do not have such luck. If I can just see him once and listen to him to say a few words, I...I would be overjoyed."

The young woman loudly said, "This person's martial arts are good, but compared with Father, he is way behind. A young girl like you doesn't know anything. When others exaggerate such matters; you immediately proclaim how great this person is. Actually you have seen this person, and he also carried you before."

The young girl blushed and said, "You are my elder sister, yet you speak so frivolously, who would believe you?"

The woman said "If you don't believe it that's up to you. That, whatever, Eagle Hero is named Yang Guo, and lived on our

Peach Blossom Island (Tao Hua Dao) in his childhood. His arm was ... Eh...Mmm... he carried you the day you were born."

This beautiful young woman is Guo Fu, the young girl is her younger sister Guo Xiang and the youth is Guo Xiang's twin brother Guo Polu. More than ten years ago, Guo Fu had married Yelu Qi and now Guo Xiang and Guo Polu have also grown up. The three of them were carrying out an assignment for their parents which was: to proceed to Jinyang and invite Quanzhen's senior priest Qiu Chuji, styled Chang Chunji (Everlasting Spring), to preside over the heroes' congress in Xiangyang. On this day the three siblings were on their way to Jinyang, but they were held up here as the cold had frozen Fenglingdu's part of the Yellow River mouth, so they listened to the many people talk throughout the night.

Guo Xiang's face had a happy expression and she mumbled to herself, "He carried me the day I was born..." She turned her head to Guo Fu and said, "Elder sister, the Eagle Hero really lived in our Peach Blossom Island (Tao Hua Dao) in his childhood? How is it I've never heard our parents mention this before?"

Guo Fu said "What do you know? Our parents have never mentioned many things to you before."

Actually Yang Guo losing his arm and Xiao Longnu getting poisoned were all caused by Guo Fu acting rashly. Whenever this matter was mentioned, Guo Jing would get very angry. Although his daughter had gotten married, he would still scold her fiercely, not giving any face to his daughter or son-in-law. Therefore everyone in the Guo family stopped talking about this matter, so Guo Xiang and Guo Polu never heard of Yang Guo's affairs.

Guo Xiang said "Since he and our family have such deep ties, why hasn't he visited us? Hey, he must surely be attending

the "Heroes Congress" on the fifteenth of March in Xiangyang."

Guo Fu said, "This person does things strangely and has such an arrogant character, most probably he won't come."

Guo Xiang said, "Elder sister, it would be good if we think of how to deliver an invitation to him." Turning her head to Song Wu, she said, "Uncle Song Wu, can you think of a way to forward a letter to the Eagle Hero?"

Song Wu shook his head saying, "The Eagle Hero wanders around the country, not having any definite destination. If he has any matters requiring our assistance, he would just pass the word down. If we try to look for him, even a lifetime may not be enough."

Guo Xiang was very disappointed. She'd listened to the various people talking about how Yang Guo saved Wang Weizhong's only child, executed Chen Dafang, interrogated Ding Daquan, redeemed Song Wu, killed the father to save the mother and all sorts of chivalrous and magnanimous acts and could not help but daydream. Listening to her elder sister say he carried her when she was young, her heart was on fire and she wished she would be able to see him once. But then she heard he would most probably not participate in the "Heroes Congress" and could not help but sigh, saying, "At the "Heroes" meeting not everyone would necessarily be a hero, but a genuine hero who is so outstanding actually may not go."

Suddenly a "Po" sound was heard and a person from the corner somersaulted and stood up. It was actually the person who was rolled into a ball and sleeping soundly. The people heard the rumbling sound, caused by that person speaking. He said, "If the lady wants to meet the Eagle Hero it's not difficult; tonight I shall take you to see him." When the people heard him they were startled, and then when they

saw his appearance, they were even more surprised. His height was less than four feet, his body was really skinny, but his head was huge. His arms were long, hands and feet were big, larger than the ordinary person's. In fact, even if they were on an ordinary person they wouldn't fit. All this on his small body, it was very weird.

Guo Xiang was filled with great happiness and said, "Excellent, but I am unknown to the Eagle Hero, rashly seeking an audience may trespass on his patience; I don't know if he will see me."

The dwarf loudly said, "If you do not see him today, I fear you may never see him in future."

Guo Xiang curiously asked, "Why?"

Guo Fu stood up, saying to the dwarf, "What is your great name?"

The dwarf laughed coldly, "I am such an ugly person; how can there be another on this Earth? Since you don't know, go home and ask your father and mother."

At this time, a distant voice slowly and softly said, "In Xishan are a group of ghosts; he is the ninth out of ten and his is called Big Head Ghost! (Da Tou Gui) If you don't find out now, then when will you?" This voice was rather incoherent, worn out and had a ghostly tone, but everybody heard every word clearly.

That big headed dwarf was shocked, made a loud noise and a "Peng" sound was heard, the flames became dark and the dwarf disappeared without a trace. The people were startled, and saw the front door had a large hole, made by the dwarf when he exited. Breaking down a door was not unheard of, but this person dashing through a door was really uncommon.

Guo Polu said, "Big sister, this dwarf has such good skills!" Guo Fu had followed her parents for a long time, and saw much of the pugilistic world, but their parents never mentioned this dwarf before, so she was struck dumb for quite a while.

But Guo Xiang said, "Among Father's teachers, the Jiangnan Seven Freaks, there was a short guy named Grandpa Ma Wangshen. Third brother, you called him a dwarf, if Father knew he might not be too happy. You should call him Senior." Guo Jing never forgot the Jiangnan Seven Freaks' kindness, and was very respectful towards them and treated any blind person or dwarf kindly, teaching the children to do that too.

Before Guo Polu could reply, a "Hu" sound was suddenly heard and the big headed dwarf stood in front of him, with wind and snow blowing in through the broken door, causing sparks from the fire to fly about. Guo Fu feared that the dwarf would injure her brother and sister so she rushed forward and blocked him from Guo Xiang and Guo Polu.

The dwarf poked his big head towards the side of Guo Fu's waist and said to Guo Xiang, "Young lady, if you want to see the Eagle Hero, follow me."

Guo Xiang said, "Alright! Elder sister, Younger brother, let's go together."

Guo Fu said, "What's so good to see about the Eagle Hero? Don't go. We don't even know this person well."

Guo Xiang said, "I'll just go for a while and return, you guys wait here for me."

Song Wu suddenly stood up and said, "Lady, do not go. This person is... .. is one of the... .. Ghosts of Xishan...If you go... .. something unfortunate might happen to you."

The dwarf grinned cunningly, saying, "You know the Xishan Ghosts? You know we are bad people?" His left palm suddenly struck out, hitting Song Wu on his shoulder. A "peng" sound was heard, Song Wu flew backwards and hit the wall and immediately fainted.

Guo Fu got angry and loudly said, "Sir, please leave! My younger sister is naive, how could she go along with you and create trouble in the middle of the night?" She turned her head and fiercely shouted at her younger sister, "Stop this foolishness. You are not going!"

At this moment, that distant voice was heard again, saying, "The ninth of the ten Xishan Ghosts, Big Head Ghost, our spirits are restless, we have been waiting for a long time!" This voice sounded a li away, yet seemed very close, causing much confusion and everybody to be terrified.

Guo Xiang made up her mind resolutely, "Tonight, even if I meet evil spirits and ghosts, I must still meet the Eagle Hero." She said, "Senior, please lead me there!" Upon saying that, her legs made a leap and she dashed through the broken door.

Guo Fu anxiously called, "What are you doing?" She put out her hand to grab her younger sister's arm but missed, so she leaped quickly, and pursued her through the door.

Who knew that when her body was about to pass through the door, the hole swiftly disappeared; Guo Fu immediately stopped her body in midair. Her dash was blocked and she had to land her feet onto the floor, her toes less than one foot from the door. She looked carefully, nearly calling out in alarm. Actually, the dwarf was using his body to block the door, the distance between them was only several inches and the tip of his nose nearly bumped into her chest; how would she not be startled? She hurriedly leapt back when a gust of cold wind blew at her body and the big headed dwarf was

gone. Guo Fu called loudly, "Younger sister, come back!" She leapt out, only hearing a distant rumbling laughter, but Guo Xiang's shadow was nowhere to be seen.

The dwarf made Guo Fu retreat in fear, he'd turned around and leapt into the snow saying: "Good! The lady is very courageous." Holding Guo Xiang's hand, he jumped forward. He utilized a rather uncommon qing gong (lightness skill), like a big frog, jumping forward continuously, and although he was short, each leap covered a great distance.

Guo Xiang's wrist was being pulled by him and she felt like a metal circlet was round her wrist and it felt rather painful. Her heart was thumping madly and she did not know where this dwarf would take her. Since childhood Guo Jing and Huang Rong taught her martial arts personally, so her wugong (martial arts) had quite a strong foundation, but she found it difficult to keep pace with the dwarf's leaps. Later on she was actually being dragged by him, forcing them to jump and land together.

After jumping like this for a little while, someone behind a mountain suddenly said, "Big Head Ghost, why are you so late? Ha-ha, you even brought a beautiful girl along!" The dwarf said, "She is Guo Jing and Huang Rong's daughter, she wanted to meet the Eagle Hero, so I then led her here." That person gawked, saying, "Guo Jing and Huang Rong's daughter?" Another person behind the mountain eerily said, "Hurry up, let's get going!" The voice became distorted, and dozens of horses appeared from behind the mountain ridge.

The heavy snow still did not stop, and the white snow created a shiny reflection. Guo Xiang saw nine strange people mounted on the horses, but most of the horses had no riders. The dwarf pulled two horses forwards and gave the reins of one to Guo Xiang with himself mounting another horse,

shouting, "Let's move!" He whistled, and the horses neighed and galloped towards the northwest.

When Guo Xiang looked at the nine people, she saw two females, one of whom was a senile appearing old woman while the other was dressed in scarlet from head to toe. She looked like she was on fire and appeared to be even more glaring in the snow's reflection. The other seven people's appearances could not be seen clearly. Guo Xiang thought carefully, "From what I heard, the Xishan Ghosts consist of ten people. At present there are exactly ten people, so this group of people must be the Xishan Ghosts. Uncle Song Wu only warned me about getting into trouble with them and that person knocked him out with one palm; this really looks ominous. They said they will take me to meet the Eagle Hero, so they shouldn't be deceiving me. They must already be acquainted with the Eagle Hero, so they can't be that evil."

In a short while they'd already covered ten li, then the first person made a "de er" sound and the horses stopped at once. He led the horse up a small hill and then turned around. Guo Xiang saw his appearance and found it startling yet funny - this person was also a dwarf, his upper body was less than two feet, but his beard was actually three feet long, hanging over the horse. His face had wrinkles, his double eyebrows tightly knit and his face was filled with worry.

She heard him say, "From here to Mapingyi is less than 3 li. The Jianghu (pugilistic world) people say that the Eagle Hero's martial arts are superb, we must discuss this in advance and not spoil the Xishan Ghosts' reputation."

The old woman said, "Then we request Eldest brother to issue an order."

The long bearded man said, "Should we fight with him on chariots or surround him?"

Guo Xiang was shocked and thought, "From his tone, they must be enemies of the Eagle Hero."

The old man said, "What are the Eagle Hero's abilities like? Seventh brother, please explain clearly."

A burly man with a body like an iron tower said, "Although I have seen him, I never fought with him, I saw... I saw... that he has some sort of demonic aura."

The red clothed woman said, "Seventh brother, how did you become enemies with the Eagle Hero? Now is the time to explain clearly so that before everybody starts fighting, we would know what's going on. You always stammer and stutter and you usually fail to reveal the whole truth."

The man got angry, saying, "We Xishan Ghosts will live and die together; since this person dares to come forward to find us, do we cower away?"

A tall and skinny person with a gloomy voice said, "Who said anything about cowering away? But even if Ninth sister didn't ask, I would ask. We have not offended him. Why did he want to expel the Xishan Ghost from Xishan?"

The man got angry and said, "Everybody, look, he cut off my ears. If you won't help me get back at him, what kind of good brothers and sisters are you?" As he said this he took off his felt hat. Under the bright reflection of the snow, everyone plainly saw his head missing both ears. The Xishan Ghosts got angry and started cursing and swearing with thunderous rage, all wanting to fight the Eagle Hero to the death.

The red clothed woman said, "Seventh brother, why did he cut off your ears? What offense did you commit? You were harassing decent women again, is it not so?"

A person with a laughing face got angry and said, "Even if Seventh brother harasses decent women; other people have

no right to interfere." This person was born with a really unusual face; although he was angry, the smile on his face did not disappear. Guo Xiang looked carefully and saw that the corners of his mouth curled upwards with both eyes squinting, so even if he was sobbing sadly, it would seem like he was smiling from ear to ear.

The man said, "No, no! On that day my wife and four concubines were quarrelling over some small matter and things were about to turn violent. This, so called, Eagle Hero passed by and saw this; he was such a busybody and unexpectedly persuaded my wives to stop. My third wife had no shame and smiled at him..."

The red clothed woman said, "Ah ha, I know, Seventh brother got jealous and forbade her to smile."

The man said, "Get jealous? I don't need other people to poke their noses into my affairs. I punched my concubine's three front teeth and told the broken-armed scum to scram."

When Guo Xiang heard this she could not bear it and said, "He gave you well-intentioned advice, why did you speak so impolitely? You were wrong there." The ten people turned their heads to look at her and could not believe this young girl dared to act so boldly.

The man got really angry and shouted, "Little twit, how do you dare to tell me what to do! Fifth brother, is this cutie your girl?"

The big headed dwarf said, "She wants to see the Eagle Hero so I brought her along to take a look, I don't care about other matters."

The man said, "Good, then I shall teach her a lesson." He raised his horse whip and lashed down towards Guo Xiang's head with a "pa" sound.

Guo Xiang lifted her whip and blocked, the two whips struck each other and interlocked together. The man used his arm to seize the whip and Guo Xiang felt a great force vigorously tugging her whip. She could not hold on any longer and released her whip, causing her palms to be scratched with searing pain. The guy took back his whip, raised it and wanted to lash down again, but the old man shouted, "Seventh brother, it's getting late, let's hurry, why do you lower yourself and fight with a child?" The man's whip was in midair, but he did not strike.

That long-sleeved old man sneered, "The Xishan Ghosts are not afraid of the sky and the earth, even Guo Jing and Huang Rong's reputation does not scare us. Little girl, if you talk again, I will butcher you immediately." He leaned forward, saying, "Seventh brother, a true man will get up again if he falls, my long beard was cut off by my enemy several years ago. How were your ears sheared off?"

The man then said, "I told the Eagle Hero to get lost, so he smiled, turned around and walked away. It's all my third concubine's fault, she cried out, saying she was forced to marry me and at that time she was not willing. Now she was bullied by my first wife. She added that after I married her, I also married a fourth concubine and did not have a conscience. That Eagle Hero turned around; his expression changed greatly and asked, 'Is this woman speaking the truth?' I said, 'So what if it is? So what if it's not? My nickname is Fairy Ghost and I kill without blinking, do you know that?' He said calmly, 'If you like her, why did you marry someone else after you married her? If you do not like her, why did you marry her at all?' I laughed loudly and said, 'At first I liked her, now I'm tired of her. It's common for a man to have three wives and four concubines. I even want to marry another four.' He said, 'You heartless creatures are far too many, how can the world's females live in peace?' Suddenly he stepped forward, drew out a dagger from my

waist and sliced off my ears. Then he pointed the dagger at my chest, shouting, 'I'll dig your heart and liver out to take a look, what colour are they?' "

Guo Xiang became delighted, could not bear it and wanted to cheer, but she saw the Xishan Ghosts' fierce and strange expressions and swallowed the "Good!" she wanted to shout.

The man continued, "Then my concubines knelt down to beg for mercy, they even cried loudly, saying they would rather be killed than me, because if I died, they must commit suicide to accompany the husband, damn, this is really disgusting. Hey, I have really lost face! I angrily shouted, 'Hurry, just kill me! The Xishan Ghosts will come and haunt you!' He wrinkled his eyebrows and said to my wives, 'Why do you still plead for such a heartless scum?' My five wives only kowtowed. He asked my third concubine, 'You said you were forced to marry him against your will. If I kill him won't it be good?' My concubine said, 'At that time I wasn't willing, later on I changed my mind. Please don't kill him.' I got angry, saying, 'Just kill me, there are nine more of us.' He said, 'OK! I won't kill you today. The Xishan Ghosts... so what? On the night at the end of this month, I shall wait at the Horses' Plains for you. Call all your ghosts together to find me. If you do not dare, the Xishan Ghosts must leave Xishan forever and never come back.' "

After they heard him say that, they did not speak for quite a while. Then the old woman said, "What weapons does he use? What school is his Wugong (martial arts) from?"

The man said, "He only has a left arm and he does not carry any weapons. Wugong...I couldn't tell."

The woman said, "Eldest brother, this person subdued seventh brother in one stroke, he must be extremely swift and agile and his Wugong must be quite unorthodox. We rely on numbers to win, you take the lead, and I and fifth brother

will help from the side, three against one, and butcher him straightaway. Do not allow him to use his skills."

The long-sleeved old man lowered his head and pondered for a while, and then he raised his head and said, "This Eagle Hero has a good reputation. Over these ten years many people have been defeated by him, he must have some astonishing skills. Today's fight is no small matter. I and Second sister will launch a sudden frontal attack, Third and Fourth brother will get close to him then attack his lower body, Fifth and Sixth brother will attack from behind, Seventh and Eighth brother will use long weapons to strike his flank, confusing him, Ninth sister will throw concealed projectiles, Tenth brother will discharge poison gas. Since the Xishan Ghosts have sworn brotherhood, the ten of us have never attacked simultaneously, today is the first time, if we can't butcher him, let us all turn into real ghosts!"

The big headed dwarf said, "Eldest brother, if ten of us attack a single person, we won't win honorably; if word of this is spread, all the Jianghu heroes will despise us."

The old woman said, "We shall butcher the Eagle Hero tonight. Apart from this girl, who else knows about this matter?" Once she said this she raised her arm.

The big headed dwarf waved his left sleeve and blocked her from Guo Xiang. Then he took out a fine needle from her sleeve and said, "Elder sister, I brought her along, please don't take her life." He turned to Guo Xiang and said, "Young lady, you want to meet the Eagle Hero, you cannot mention this matter to anyone, otherwise you should go back quickly now."

Guo Xiang was alarmed, afraid and also angry, thinking, "This old woman has such vicious moves; if not for the short uncle saving me, I could have died from her silent needles without a doubt." So she said, "Alright I will not speak of it."

But she continued, "You have ten brothers, does he have a single helper?"

The big headed dwarf laughed loudly and said, "The Eagle Hero only appeared in Jianghu around ten years ago, but we never heard that he has any assistants. He has this big bird which is unable to speak to accompany him." He then raised the horse's reins, loudly shouting, "Let's go!" The ten people galloped and the dwarf said to Guo Xiang, "Later, when we start fighting, you must not leave my side." Guo Xiang nodded, she knew that the Xishan Ghosts were quite cruel and merciless, but this big headed dwarf is looking after her. He prevented his companion from harming her, but his ways were rough; although he spoke in a low voice, the other nine people heard him.

Guo Xiang rode along with the other people. She saw the Xishan Ghosts all had unique skills; no matter how strong the Eagle Hero's wugong might be, how could he fight ten people alone? She thought, "If father and mother were here it would be good, they wouldn't stand by and do nothing."

Just at this time, several tiger roars could be heard in the dark forest in front of them and the horses gave a startled neigh, some standing motionless, some trying to escape. The skinny man waved his horse whip and was the first to rush into the woods.

The old woman scolded, "You lousy animals, you even fear a small cat eating you up?" The group charged forwards and entered the woods. They moved round ten feet when suddenly a person in front fiercely shouted, "Who are these brave people who dare to enter the Beastly Mountain Village at night without permission?"

The Xishan Ghosts stopped their horses, seeing only a person standing on the path, a brave tiger squatting next to him. The horses heard the tiger growling and were alarmed. The

long-sleeved old man put his hands together to greet that person, immediately saying, "The Xishan Ghosts entered this place without informing you, pardon our rudeness."

That person said, "Oh, the Xishan Ghosts? You must be the Long Sleeve Ghost?"

The old man said, "Precisely. We have an important matter at hand and we are rushing to the Horses' Plains, when we return we will apologize for this." He knew this character was not very affable but at this moment they needed all their strength to deal with the Eagle Hero, so he hoped not to complicate matters and spoke very politely.

That person said, "Gentlemen, please wait." He raised his voice and called, "Eldest brother, it's the Xishan Ghosts going to the Horses' Plains; they said they will apologize when they return." The ghosts heard this and were disgruntled, thinking, "We said we would return and apologize, but those are only polite words. Would the Xishan Ghosts really bow down to this person?" The Xishan Ghosts all had outstanding skills, before they became sworn brothers they had already gotten through many troubles, creating much havoc in Shanxi in recent years. The people of Wulin (martial arts world) all dreaded them. Now the ten people are assembled together and if they had no prior appointment with the Eagle Hero on that night, they would beat this person good and proper just based on his words alone.

They heard a screeching voice deep in the forest saying, "Apologizes are not needed, let them go around the forest."

When they heard this they got angry immediately. The skinny person with the bamboo staff sneered, "The Xishan Ghosts never take detours!" He raised the horse's reins and charged straight towards the person standing on the path.

That person raised his left hand and two tigers near him threw themselves forward immediately, causing the skinny man's horse to be frightened and rear up. The skinny man's riding skills were really good; he bent down on the saddle, both hands holding a short spear, fiercely thrusting at the two tigers. The tiger on his left leapt aside while the tiger on the right scratched the horse's belly with its claws; but that tiger gave a roar because it was injured by the spear. The skinny man jumped onto the ground, shouting, "Watch my weapons!" He thrust the spears forth, one high one low, displaying the "Double Dragon Fu Yuan Skill", but he did not advance forward.

The person coldly said, "You injured my family's watch-cat, now whether you take the detour or not is not up to you. Wu Changgui (Uncommon Ghost), leave your spears behind!"

When Wu Changgui found that the person knew his nickname, he said, "Who are you, sir? The Beastly Mountain Village was supposed to be in Western Liang, why has it moved to Southern Jin? If you want me to leave my spears, that's very easy to do."

The person said, "If our Beastly Mountain Village wants to move, must we report to the Xishan Ghosts? We were tired of living in Western Liang so we moved to Southern Jin to play. My eldest brother, by telling you to take a detour, was being extremely polite. My third brother is sick and doesn't like outsiders harassing us, do you understand?" When he said this, he suddenly stretched his left hand out and grabbed Wu Changgui's right spear near the edge.

Wu Changgui never expected him to move so fast, so he thrust his left spear forward and increased his right hand's strength.

The person extended his right hand and grabbed Wu Changgui's left spear as well. The two people had great

strength, and no one let go of the weapons. A "pa" sound was made and the two spears snapped.

The Xishan Ghosts shrugged and the long-sleeved old man said, "Sir are you the Eight-Handed Monkey Immortal Shi? Is the Golden Claw Lion King ill? At this moment we have a matter at hand, tomorrow at this time, we shall meet here again."

The masters of the Beastly Mountain Village are five brothers, the eldest being White Forehead Mountain Lord Shi Bowei, the second Caring Eyesight Sage Shi Zhongmeng, the third Golden Claw Lion King Shi Shugang, the fourth Immortal Of Giant Strength Shi Jiqiang, the youngest Eight-Handed Monkey Immortal Shi Mengjie was the one present here. The five brothers inherited the animals from their ancestors. These five people all live unusually and they not only have superb taming skills, they also learned martial arts from the animals' movements. The brothers had these beasts as companions since childhood, taking the beasts as their masters and learning martial skills. Shi Shugang entered the mountains when he was twenty years old and met an outstanding person, learning advanced internal strength techniques from him. He then went home and taught his brothers. The five people raised many wild animals and improved their wugong tremendously. The Beastly Mountain Village's reputation gradually became known in Jianghu and the Wulin people called them "Tiger, Leopard, Lion, Elephant and Monkey". When the Long Sleeve Ghost heard Shi Shugang was sick, he was relieved; he thought no matter how good the Shi brothers were, the Xishan Ghosts would not be afraid. Now that the central pillar of the "Tiger, Leopard, Lion, Elephant and Monkey" Lion King was sick, it would definitely not be a problem to handle them, so he proposed a duel the next evening.

Eight-Handed Monkey Immortal Shi Mengjie said, "Tomorrow night we shall wait outside the forest for you at 11 p.m." Saying that he put his hands together to salute and shot the broken spear heads into a tree next to the Long Sleeve Ghost.

The Long Sleeve Ghost was startled, thinking, "Why does he not allow us to cut through the forest? What do the Shi brothers have in this forest?" He also put his hands together and saluted, "The Xishan Ghosts bid farewell!" He nudged the horse with his legs and moved forwards. Shi Mengjie said loudly, "Hold! My eldest brother told you to take a detour, didn't you hear?"

The Long Sleeve Ghost pulled the reins and was about to reply when he heard people in the northeast and northwest of the woods laughing loudly at the same time, then a thick cloud of smoke appeared. A person called out, "What the heck are you doing in the woods? You can't hide it from our group of ghosts." Another person said, "You are just meeting your ancestors." (Making puns with the Chinese words.) Actually the eighth and tenth ghost had sneaked behind Shi Mengjie and set a fire while he was talking to the Long Sleeve Ghost.

The flame leapt upwards, and then he heard the two ghosts' voices call out in alarm as they wildly dashed back to the group, breathless, their facial expressions bearing great fear. The Long Sleeve Ghost shouted, "What?" One of them said, "Tigers, tigers! 100, 200 of them..."

When Shi Mengjie saw the fire in the forest he got really angry, shouting, "Eldest brother, second brother, this is important, let them go; we can easily find them later."

Suddenly everyone saw a blurred figure; a dog-like creature squirmed through the woods and dashed away in the blink of an eye. It was pretty small, had four long legs, a snow white

coat, had a black tail, looked like a dog yet looked like a cat. Shi Mengjie called loudly: "The "Nine-Tailed Fox has emerged!" and started pursuing it, his face looking anxious and panic-stricken.

A fierce voice was heard from the back of the woods, sounding like a lion's or a tiger's roar, yet sounding like someone shouting loudly. When Guo Xiang heard this shout a chill went down her spine. When this sound died down, a hundred beasts roared from all directions, including lions, tigers, leopards, wolves, elephants, monkeys and orangutans... For a while it was not very clear, and then with a thundering rumble the wild animals rushed out from the forest. Then someone said, "Eldest brother head towards the northeast, second brother go towards the northwest, fourth brother hurry to the southwest... "This voice and the howl were similar.

However Guo Xiang only saw several shadows flashing around, leaving the forest. She knew perfectly well there was danger, but her curiosity took over and she hurriedly chased after them out of the woods. The Big Head Ghost called out, "Miss Guo, don't wander about!" He then pursued her.

Guo Xiang left the woods and saw a strange sight; five people leading a group of wild animals each, moving rapidly in five directions on the snowy plain. These wild animals were all well-trained, not fighting among each other, forming packs, running in an orderly way. Guo Xiang was frightened but also thought this was amusing. The five groups of animals got closer and formed a big circle.

Suddenly a white flash appeared - that dog-like animal squeezed out of the encirclement, zooming in front of Guo Xiang, really moving like lightning. Guo Xiang was startled and bent down to catch it with her hand, but that small animal had already dashed several feet away. It stood still,

suddenly turning its head to look at Guo Xiang with its fiery red eyes, looking like two embers in the dark.

The Shi brothers called out, "The Nine-Tailed Fox! It's over there!" The groups of animals rushed forward together like a moving mountain.

Guo Xiang rode towards the side to avoid them, but when the horse saw so many wild animals, it got frightened. Its legs became weak, then its legs bent and it knelt down on the ground. Guo Xiang was shocked thinking, "The group of beasts are rushing towards me; they are going to trample me into minced meat!" She leapt away from the horse and dashed off. She still smelled the animals but the groups of beasts rushed by her like the torrents of a river and were far away before long.

By now all the Xishan Ghosts had also gotten out of the forest. The Long Sleeve Ghost said, "No matter how strong the Shi brothers' Wugong is, we are not afraid, but these many animals are not easy to deal with. Tonight we won't provoke them so that we'll still have our strength to deal with the Eagle Hero. Everybody, let's go!"

The old woman said, "Good, tonight after we kill the Eagle Hero we will burn the lions and roast the tigers tomorrow!" She then raised the reins and started to gallop around the forest.

The fierce roars of the lions and tigers were heard again, the groups of beasts were returning on separate paths. But this time the roars didn't sound so vicious and the animals were not running very fast. The Long Sleeve Ghost suddenly turned green and called out, "Oh no, hurry, let's go!" But the wild animals were growling in all directions and soon they were surrounded by the group of beasts. The Long Sleeve Ghost whistled and the ten people leapt off the horses,

standing in five positions, each drawing their weapons, silently waiting for the enemy to arrive.

The Big Head Ghost softly said, "Young Lady, leave quickly, you shouldn't risk your life here."

Guo Xiang said, "Where's the Eagle Hero? You agreed to take me to him."

The Big Head Ghost frowned, "Have you not seen all these wicked beasts?"

Guo Xiang said, "You should try to reason with the animals' masters, saying you and the Eagle Hero have an appointment, and you shouldn't delay much longer."

The Big Head Ghost said, "Humph, the Xishan Ghosts never reason with anyone."

While saying that, the Shi brothers had led the wild animals back. The five people were all wearing animal skins, standing forty to fifty feet away from the Xishan Ghosts. The fifth brother Shi Mengjie said, "The Beastly Mountain Village and the Xishan Ghosts have no bad blood, why did you set the forest on fire and scare away the Nine-Tailed Fox?"

Guo Xiang heard him say this with deep anger and thought, "That small animal may be cute, but it's nothing great, why should they kick up such a big fuss? It obviously has only one tail, how could it be called the Nine-Tailed Fox?"

The red-clothed female said, "As for today's matter, the fault lies with the Shi brothers. This Beastly Mountain Village has been at Ganliang for a long time and suddenly it moved to Shanxi. Now you don't allow people to pass through on the main road in the middle of the night. With such actions how could you blame others?"

The White Forehead Mountain Lord Shi Bowei shouted, "Since it has come to this stage, what more can be said? The Xishan Ghosts shall not live." Loudly roaring, he charged unarmed to the Long Sleeve Ghost, his palms imitating tigers' claws, causing wind to be generated before his palms arrived; even a fierce tiger could not compare to its ferocity.

The Long Sleeve Ghost slipped aside, moving back towards the left. He shouted and swept a long pointed weapon towards Shi Bowei. Shi Bowei stretched his claws out, grasping the end weapon, which was a thick steel rod. Before his palm held firmly, he felt heat shoot through his palms and he hurriedly let it go, the left palm executed an advanced stance to avoid the steel rod. If he were not quick enough his chest would have been pierced by the rod. Shi Bowei was startled, "The Xishan Ghosts' reputation has risen in recent years, so they actually live up to it." He did not dare to be careless and drew his weapon with a "chia lang lang" sound - it was pair of double hooks. The right hook weighed 18 catties while the left hook weighed 17 catties; it was a fierce and sharp weapon, with the hooks giving off yellow light. He then fought fiercely with the steel rod.

Now Shi Zhongmeng grasped the rod, fighting one-on-two, sparring with Cui Ming Ghost's knife and Shang Meng Ghost's chain spear. Shi Jiqiang and the old woman grappled along a long rope; although his strength was great, it was useless against the old woman's soft sleeve. He roared again and again, exhibiting his giant's strength, but was unable to utilize it. Shi Mengjie's foe was the copper hammer-wielding Big Head Ghost. Shi Mengjie's pen stances were complex and strange, so the Big Head Ghost found it hard to defend himself, and then the red clothed woman raised her knife and went forward to help him. On the snowy ground, the ten people were divided into four groups fighting viciously under the heavy snow, unable to decide victory or defeat.

The Xishan Ghosts still had six people not in action yet while the opponents only had the Lion King standing by. They saw him leaning on a lion's body, sickly and without any strength. In this battle the Xishan ghosts fought with numbers, showing the potential for victory, but the Shi brothers only had to whistle and the group of beasts would attack, causing the Xishan Ghosts to go from victory to defeat.

Guo Xiang saw the group of beasts surrounding them and was afraid, she also remembered she wanted see the Eagle Hero, so she said, "Uncle Big Head Ghost, stop fighting, you have more people, even if you win it wouldn't be honorable. You offended them, just apologize!" But who would bother about her?

Ten people fought violently for a long time. The Long Sleeve Ghost and Shi Bowei were on par. The old woman's long rope moved flexibly and had many changes within, forming big and small circles; if Shi Jiqiang lost his focus, he would have been hanged by her rope. Luckily his broadsword made big moves with great ferocity, so the old woman could not afford to be careless. The Big Head Ghost and the Clever Ghost were hard and soft respectively, complementing one another, but Shi Mengjie's moves were quick yet strange, as the saying goes a quick hit counters three slow. The three people were fighting in circles, but Shi Mengjie did not lose the upper hand yet. The Big Head Ghost roared like rumbling thunder while the Clever Ghost chatted in a gloomy tone, dividing the enemy's attention. Shi Mengjie turned a deaf ear to them and just concentrated on their battle.

On this side the Cui Ming Ghost and the Shang Men Ghost actually could not withstand Shi Zhongmeng's silver rod. His silver rod was short and hollow, and used strange moves. The three people were fighting near the border of the forest. The Shang Men Ghost thrust his spear forward; Shi Zhongmeng aimed his rod at him and thrust directly at the spear, causing

the spear to go right through into the hollow rod. The Shang Men Ghost was greatly startled but he was not willing to let go of his weapon. The Tao Zhai Ghost leapt up to help them, swinging his slab towards Shi Zhongmeng's silver rod. Shi Zhongmeng drew his rod back and retreated, allowing the Shang Men Ghost to regain his weapon. The Tao Zhai Ghost's weapon resembled an iron block and it was actually an accounts book cast in iron. The book had five pages and each page could be flipped about, its edges sharper than knives and it made a strange and sharp weapon.

The Xishan Ghosts originally had their respective surnames, but ever since the "Xishan Ghosts" became known, they discarded their real names and used "Ghost" as their nicknames. The ten people all had unusual and strange appearances so the ten brothers said, "The Jianghu heroes call us ghosts, so we shall see if the people are good or the ghosts are fierce?" That Tao Zhai Ghost made himself that iron book because he avenged any minor wrongs, never willing to let off anyone who offends him even slightly. So the martial arts world nicknamed him the "Tao Zhai Ghost (Debt Collecting Ghost)". He was very pleased with this nickname and cast an iron accounts book, carving the names of those who offended him on the iron pages, and then writing off those names after he has settled the debt.

The silver rod was a unique weapon, but the iron accounts book was actually more unusual, with five iron sheets attacking together, making "dang dang" noise. The Cui Ming, Shang Men and Tao Zhai Ghosts fought Shi Zhongmeng together, gradually gaining an advantage.

Guo Xiang stood at the side, watching the group of ghosts and the Shi brothers fighting non-stop, thinking that their appointment with the Eagle Hero was long overdue. She feared that he'd left after waiting impatiently. She became

more and more anxious, but was incapable of stopping the fight.

The hundreds of beasts lay around them, forming a tight circle. The Xishan Ghosts looked around them and saw the bright glitter of eyes everywhere in the darkness and knew that even if they killed all the Shi brothers, it would be difficult to get out of the animals' siege. The old woman wanted to use her rope and tie down Shi Jiqiang to force the Shi brothers to recall their animals, making a pathway for their exit. But Shi Jiqiang's martial arts were at the same level as hers, how easy could that be? The Laughing Ghost called out, "Second sister, let me help you." He drew his weapon from his waist and threw himself towards Shi Jiqiang.

Shi Jiqiang was fighting ferociously when he saw the Laughing Ghost jumping forward, but it suited him and he said, "Great!" He brought his bronze weapon fiercely down on that ghost's head. The Laughing Ghost leaned aside blocking with his two whips, but the whips snapped with a "Pu" sound. The Laughing Ghost was greatly startled and quickly rolled away. "Peng!" The bronze weapon struck the ground. The Laughing Ghost dipped his hand into his clothes and grasped some poisonous powder. Standing up immediately he flung it towards Shi Jiqiang. Shi Jiqiang suddenly saw a red mist and was hit by it, losing his footing, falling immediately. The old woman cast her rope and lassoed his legs.

Shi Bowei, Shi Zhongmeng and Shi Mengjie saw their brother fall and were startled and angry. If he was captured, they could not rescue him. Guo Xiang called out, "What are you doing? You used trickery to hurt him, what kind of man are you?" She was not helping any party, but when she saw the Laughing Ghost using such a dirty move, she could not bear it and criticized him.

At this time a sudden low roar was heard, the Lion King Shi Shugang stood up slowly, growling lowly, "Put down my fourth brother!"

Shi Jiqiang had passed out. The old woman used her long rope to tie his hands up as well, but was wary of his great strength, fearing that he would suddenly awaken and snap her rope, so she blocked his accupoint and said, "Get your animals to move away then we will release him!" She saw Shi Shugang's dull eyes and sallow face, walking unsteadily; he was obviously seriously sick, so she paid no attention to him.

Guo Xiang saw Shi Shugang slowly walking towards the ghosts, hands and feet unsteady, meeting the enemy in spite of his illness, just like a real man, so she quickly said, "Hey, you're sick, don't fight." Shi Shugang nodded to her and said, "Thanks." But he did not stop and continued towards Shi Jiqiang. The Laughing Ghost exchanged glances with the old woman (Hanging Ghost) and they stood forward together, wanting to snare him as well.

They threw themselves onto Shi Shugang, stretching out their hands when Shi Shugang growled fiercely; his left hand smacking the Hanging Ghost's head, his right hand tugging the Laughing Ghost's back and the two people felt a great strength suddenly pressing down on them. Their legs gave way and they nearly fell down, so they hurriedly leaped away. Fortunately for them Shi Shugang did not pursue them. Two people looked at each other in amazement and broke out in a cold sweat, not expecting this sick person to be so strong.

Shi Shugang bent down to clear his brother's accupoint. He pulled gently and snapped the Hanging Ghost's rope in several places. But Shi Jiqiang was poisoned and did not awake. Shi Shugang frowned and shouted, "Hand over the

antidote!" The Laughing Ghost said, "You recall your animals, then I give up the antidote."

Shi Shugang snorted and walked shakily to the Laughing Ghost. The Laughing Ghost did not dare take him head-on and stepped aside quickly. Shi Shugang was sick and could not chase after him, but continued to walk weakly to him. The four ghosts watching from the side jumped up while the Laughing Ghost also turned around to fight. Shi Shugang struck out with his palm slowly, but his palm strength was really great. The five ghosts encircled him, punching here and chopping there, but did not dare get closer to him. The Laughing Ghost feared that he would poison his own brothers, so he did not release the poison gas.

Guo Xiang thought, "This man lost to dirty tricks, it's really pitiful!" She grabbed some snow and rubbed on Shi Jiqiang's forehead, and then she put a snowball in his mouth. The poison gas effects were not long-lasting and Shi Jiqiang's body was tough, he felt cold, and slowly awoke. He saw Guo Xiang still picking up snow for him and said, "Many thanks, young lady!" He rolled and stood up, rubbed his eyes and saw the five ghosts besieging Shi Shugang, so he loudly called out, "Third brother step aside!" He stretched out his hand and twisted the Laughing Ghost's neck.

Shi Bowei's hooks and the Long Sleeve Ghost's steel rod were clashing rapidly, and then he saw Shi Jiqiang awake, he felt very happy and cheered loudly. The beasts lying by the side heard this cheer and all stood up immediately, waiting to pounce. Shi Bowei cheered again and the beasts followed with their roars. The Xishan Ghosts have had many battle experiences, but this time they could not help but tremble in fear. Before the beastly roars died away the animals charged towards the Xishan Ghosts.

Guo Xiang shouted "Ah!", and her face turned pale. Shi Shugang stretched out his hand and shoved a tiger pouncing on Guo Xiang away; he took off his skin hat and placed it on Guo Xiang's head. The animals have been trained for a long time, as soon as they saw her put on the skin hat; they left her alone and turned their attention to the ten ghosts. Tigers, wolves, leopards, apes and lions all bit and scratched at the ten ghosts. The Xishan Ghosts furiously killed seven or eight beasts, but the Shi brothers attacked from the side and the beasts kept coming and coming, becoming too many to handle. The ten people were all injured, their clothes tattered and dripping with blood, they were about to lose their lives and could not escape from the animals' clutches.

Guo Xiang saw three lions surrounding the Big Head Ghost, his bronze hammer had fallen to the ground, his right arm trapped in a lion's mouth, relying entirely on his left palm to block the lions. Guo Xiang remembered him defending her before and saw him so distressed, she could not help it and without hesitation, she took off the skin hat and immediately placed it on his head. But his head was too big for the hat, so it looked extremely funny as it kept bouncing around his head. When the Shi brothers trained their animals, they specially made the skin hats for the animals to differentiate between friend and foe, so when they saw the Big Head Ghost put on the hat, they moved away immediately. But now four leopards surrounded Guo Xiang.

Shi Shugang was now trying to snatch away the Long Sleeve Ghost's steel rod to prevent him from injuring too many animals when he heard Guo Xiang calling for help, he turned his head to look and was startled, they were too far apart and he could not go to her rescue. But strangely, the four leopards did not attack Guo Xiang; they only sniffed and walked around her, being very friendly to her. Guo Xiang was shocked speechless, but the four leopards were not harming her. She remembered her mother and sister once told her

that she drank leopard's milk when young, so these four leopards must have mistaken her for one of their own. She was pleasantly surprised and bent down to hug the leopards' necks while they licked her hands and cheeks. Guo Xiang felt somewhat itchy and started laughing. Since the Shi brothers started training their animals, they had never seen something like this before and were all greatly surprised.

The Big Head Ghost managed to avoid any trouble with the skin hat, but he saw his brothers and sisters all in a dire situation and did not want to get away alone. Although the Xishan Ghosts were not honorable and usually did heretical things, their loyalty towards one another was very deep, so he grasped the hat immediately and threw it to the red clothed woman, saying, "Ninth sister, you quickly escape." She caught the hat and threw it towards the Long Sleeve Ghost and called out, "Eldest brother, you leave first, just avenge us in future." But he threw the hat to the Laughing Ghost and said, "Tenth brother, it's never too late for revenge, I won't live any much longer anyway." The ten people were actually unwilling to use this life-saving device.

The Laughing Ghost was tying down five wolves and did not throw the hat. However wolves were extremely savage, when they smelled blood, they ignored the hat on the Laughing Ghost and did not want to give up their meal. The Laughing Ghost cursed loudly, but his face was still carrying a happy expression. Then out of nowhere a person with a clear and cold voice said, "The Xishan Ghosts do not keep their word, they made me wait for half a night. So here they are fooling around with animals!"

Guo Xiang felt very happy, saying in her heart, "The Eagle Hero is here!" She lifted her head and saw a person sitting on a big tree's branch with a large headed and magnificently ugly eagle. This person wore a long grey gown, his right sleeve stuffed in his waistband, showing his missing arm. She

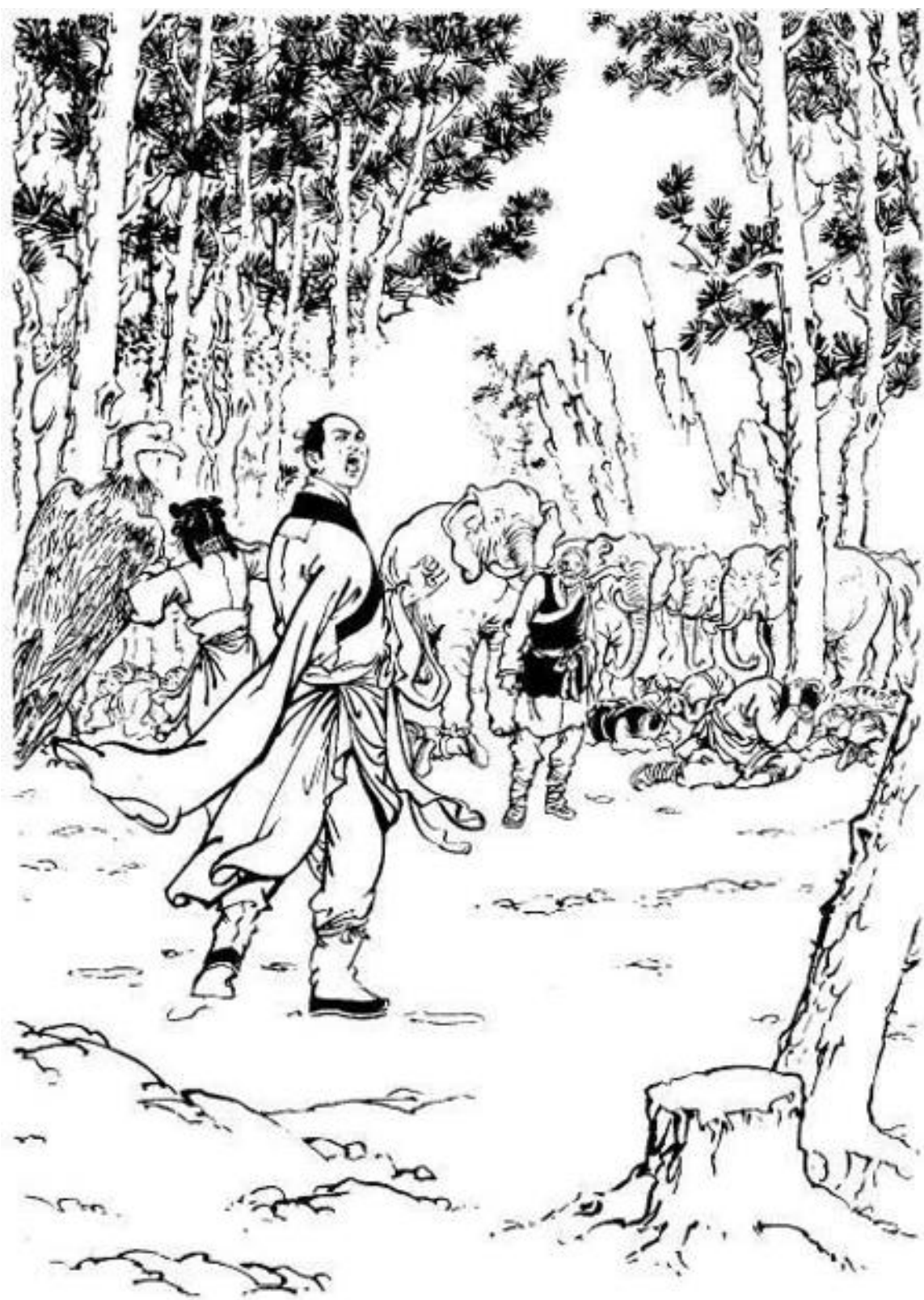
looked at his face and could not help but feel her goose bumps rising; she saw a sallow complexion and a grotesque face, not looking like a live person. He looked like a zombie. The Xishan Ghosts all looked strange and weird, but definitely were not as ugly as he was.

Before Guo Xiang saw him, her young girl's heart imagined him to be like a suave Confucian scholar, outstandingly handsome, but when she saw him now, she was greatly disappointed and thought, "So there is such an ugly person in the world!" She could not bear it and looked at him again and saw his pupils glinting, exuding a heroic aura. When the eyes flashed across and gazed at her face, as if they sensed something slightly strange. Guo Xiang felt her heart racing and could not help but lower her head, slowly finding the Eagle Hero not to be so ugly anymore.

End of Chapter 33.

Chapter 34 - Settling a Dispute

Translated by Jin_Yong_Fan & Frans Soetomo



Yang Guo opened his mouth and roared to the sky. It was like a tiger or dragon's roar. Guo Xiang's heartbeat sped up and she could barely stand up. Yang Guo's dragon roar seemed like it would never end. The animals started to fall down one by one; the Xishan Ghosts and the Shi Brothers also fell down; leaving only the elephants and two people barely standing up. They were Shi Shu Gang and Guo Xiang.

Above them was none other than Yang Guo. During these sixteen years his heart ached and yearned for Xiao Longnu. He wandered around with his eagle and did many heroic deeds, earning him the title 'Eagle Hero'. He knew that he was young and handsome and had attracted lots of girls already. Miss Gongsun sacrificed herself for him, Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang loved him dearly. So he often wore Huang Yaoshi's human skin mask, to conceal his real looks. This night he had an appointment with the Xishan Ghosts; but after waiting for half a night without seeing any of them, he went looking and arrived at the forest.

The Xishan Ghosts were holding tight to their dear lives in the battle against the beasts. Upon hearing Yang Guo's voice they were desperate. With one more formidable enemy they lost all hope of ever escaping alive. They thought, "It's over. It's over. This might possibly be our last battle."

"You others are the Beastly Mountain Villagers, the Shi brothers?" Yang Guo called, "Can you hold your palms and listen to me for a second."

Shi Bowei said, "Our surname is indeed 'Shi'. Who are you, Sir?" He paused a moment and said, "Ah! I believe you are the Eagle Hero?"

Yang Guo said, "You are correct. I am the Eagle Hero. Quickly call off your beasts or else the Xishan Ghosts will turn into real ghosts."

Shi Bowei said, "Everybody will turn into real ghosts."

Yang Guo said, "The Xishan Ghosts have an appointment with me. If they do die, who will speak to me?"

Shi Bowei heard him say all this and gave out a cold laugh. Yang Guo said, "You know I am the Eagle Hero, why aren't you listening to me?"

Shi Bowei said, "So what if you are the Eagle Hero. If you have any skills, come down here and pull the animals back yourself."

Yang Guo said, "OK. Brother Eagle, let's get down." One man and one eagle leapt from the tree.

Shaking out his sleeve, he jumped down with the eagle. Several beasts immediately pounced at them as soon as their feet touched the ground. The eagle waved its wings left and right. The wolves and other smaller animals were pushed back by the gust of wind alone. The bigger animals were knocked down or pushed back staggering with each hit. Suddenly a very big lion and a very big tiger leaped at them with loud roars. The eagle again parried the attack with its formidable wings. The lion and the tiger were knocked over down. The eagle's left wing struck the tiger's head and it died instantly. This incident frightened the other animals away.

Shi Bowei was furious. With all his fingers open like a claw he leaped and tried to grab Yang Guo's chest. Yang Guo only smiled, then moved his body a little bit and shook his empty sleeve. "Smack!" the sleeve hit Shi Bowei's hands as if hit by a saber. Bowei cried out in pain.

Walking slowly Shi Shugang tried to push Yang Guo with both his hands. "Good!" cried Yang Guo, parrying the attack with his left hand. He only exerted 30% of his energy. After training against the waves of the tide for many years, Yang Guo's strength was formidable. He could push a big tree down, let alone a mere flesh and blood human.

Shi Shugang had received some lessons on internal energy and thus had strong internal energy. Even so, when Yang Guo's hand touched his, he could not help but stagger back. He tried with all his might to hold his ground.

“Watch out!” shouted Yang Guo, while pushing him back. Shi Shugang’s vision darkened and he knew he was going to die.

“Ah! You’re sick?” suddenly hearing Yang Guo’s voice. Immediately he felt the enormous power pushing him back vanish and Shi Shugang was spared. He was startled and stared at the Eagle Hero blankly.

Looking at him, Shi Bowei, Shi Zhongmeng, Shi Jiqiang and Shi Mengjie thought that their brother was heavily injured. Roaring loudly they attacked Yang Guo in unison.

In a flash Yang Guo leaped and grabbed a tiger by the neck, which he then used as his weapon to parry the four brothers’ attack.

As we remember, Yang Guo had used the heavy black-steel sword; weight about 70 catties, even before he trained against the tide’s waves. The tiger was only a little over 100 catties. Thus he easily lifted and used the tiger as a weapon against its own masters. The tiger clawed and bit frantically.

Guo Xiang watched this incident from the sideline. She was delighted; laughing and clapping she shouted, “Good! Eagle Hero, good! Shi Brothers, you’d better surrender now.”

Yang Guo looked at the girl out of the corner of his eye, wondering in his heart, “Who is this girl? She plays with leopards, yet does not take the Shi Brothers’ side.”

In the meantime, Shi Shugang tried to circulate his ‘chi’, and finding nothing amiss, he understood the Eagle Hero had shown him mercy. He thought, “Based on our true skills, even if the five of us go together, we would not be his match.” Looking at his brothers he shouted, “Brothers, stop! We have to know our limits.”

Hearing his shout, Shi Zhongmeng who was thrusting his silver pipe immediately pulled his weapon back. But the ‘Immortal of Giant Strength’ Shi Jiqiang, the reckless one of the family, didn’t listen; he thought, “What limits? Let him eat my staff first, and

then we talk.” He kept attacking Yang Guo’s head with his “Elephant Opening a Mountain” stance. This attack mimicked how an elephant used its trunk. His copper staff was shaped like an elephant trunk; small in front, bigger and a little curved toward the back. His force was a mixture of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’; no less than 1000 jins strong.

Yang Guo did not budge. He threw his tiger away, flipped his hand, and caught the end of the staff. He smiled and said, “OK let’s have a duel and see who is stronger.”

Shi Jiqiang used all his strength to push down. His ‘Elephant Trunk Staff’ was above Yang Guo’s head but no matter how much force Shi Jiqiang used the staff would not go down.

Shi Shugang said, “Fourth brother, don’t be rude.”

Shi Jiqiang tried to retreat and pull his staff away but it wouldn’t budge. Shi Jiqiang tried to pull back three times but still couldn’t retrieve his staff. Yang Guo thought, “He has a powerful strength; if I don’t overcome him with my strength this man will not give in.”

So Yang Guo used his full strength, his left hand came up and grabbed the middle of the staff. The force was focused towards the middle of the staff trying to force Shi Jiqiang to release it. But Shi Jiqiang did not let go forcing the staff to bend upwards.

Yang Guo shouted out, “Good!” He used his strength and internal energy and caused the staff to bend down. But Shi Jiqiang still refused to let go.

“Crack!” the staff broke in half. Shi Jiqiang’s palms were both bleeding, but he still held the half staff in his hands. Yang Guo saw Shi Jiqiang’s tenacity and thought it was amusing and started laughing. He picked up the other half of the staff and threw it to the ground. It struck the earth and went deep until it was completely buried.

He looked around and saw the Shi brothers, Shi Shugang, Shi Mengjie and the others were trying to calm down and control all

the beasts. But because they had smelled blood; the beasts were out of control. Yang Guo signaled to Guo Xiang to plug her ears. Guo Xiang did not understand but still listened and did what she was told. She saw Yang Guo opened his mouth and he roared to the sky. It was like a tiger or dragon's roar.

Even though Guo Xiang had plugged her ears, she could still hear the roar. Her heartbeat sped up and she could barely stand up. But luckily she had practiced the purest form of internal energy with her father Guo Jing and her mother Huang Rong ever since she was little. So even though she was young, her internal energy was better than an average martial artists and she didn't fall down but only staggered a few times.

Yang Guo's dragon roar seemed like it would never end. Everybody's face changed color. The animals started to fall down one by one, leaving only the elephants still standing. Slowly one by one the Xishan Ghosts fell down. Next the Shi Brothers also fell down; leaving only two people barely standing up. They were Shi Shugang and Guo Xiang. Yang Guo was amazed and impressed that this sick man, Shi Shugang, was able to stay standing. He knew that if he continued he would hurt Shi Shugang even more.

So he waved his sleeve and his dragon roar stopped. The eagle looked proudly at Yang Guo. Only then did everybody and the beasts slowly stand up. The wolves and other small animals had not awakened yet; their bodies still scattered about on the snow. The larger animals did not wait for the Shi Brothers' command, they tucked their tails between their legs and scampered away deep into the woods, not even daring to look back. The Shi Brothers and Xishan Ghosts have never met such opponent in their entire lives. They just stared at Yang Guo and could not utter a single word. Yang Guo said, "Shi Brothers, I apologize for the disturbance. I have an appointment with Xishan Ghosts; but since you had started fighting, I had to intervene. After taking care of this small problem, I will let you continue your fight and I promise not to be on anybody's side." He turned his body around

and continued, "Well? Are you going to fight me one on one, or are all of you going to fight me together?"

The one supposed to answer his question would be the Fairy Ghost, the burly man with a body like an iron tower, whose ears were cut off by the Eagle Hero. But since he was still dazed from the roar, he couldn't say anything. The Long Beard Ghost then moved a step forward. He clasped his fists in respect, bowing to the ground and said, "Eagle Hero, your skill and ours are like heaven and earth apart. We, the Xishan Ghosts, do not dare to fight you. Our lives have been saved by you. In the future, if Great Hero (Da Xia) ever has any need of our services, even if we have to go through water or fire, we will comply. If Da Xia wants us to leave Shanxi, we will not stay another second."

As soon as he saw the Long Beard Ghost, Yang Guo was suspicious. And now, after hearing his voice, he asked straight away, "Are you not the one surnamed Fan with a given name Yiweng?"

The Long Beard Ghost was indeed Fan Yiweng, the first disciple of Gongsun Zhi, master of the Passionless Valley. After Yang Guo spared his life at the Valley, he had run away and hidden himself. About ten years later he re-entered the Jianghu world and with his level of martial arts, he managed to attain the first position of the Xishan Ghosts. During the battle at the 'Broken Heart Cliff' Yang Guo's arm had not yet been chopped off by Guo Fu. Besides, Yang Guo was wearing a mask now, so he did not recognize him. Hearing the question, he bowed and answered, "This lowly one is indeed Fan Yiweng. What is your command, Great Hero?"

Yang Guo smiled and lifted his hand. "Don't use such humility. If you want my command, I will say it: Do not move away from Xishan. Fairy Ghost, you'd better let your four concubines go!"

"Very well," said the Fairy Ghost. He was silent for a moment and then continued, "If they don't want to go, I'll beat them with a stick."

Yang Guo was taken aback. He recalled what happened that day, how this Ghost's wife and four concubines knelt down and begged him for mercy. He laughed and said, "No! You can't beat them. If they want to leave, just let them leave; but if they want to stay with you ..." he heaved a sigh. "An outsider certainly cannot interfere. Uh, did you say you were going to take four more concubines to make yours exactly eight?"

The Fairy Ghost blushed. "Because of my concubines the Eagle Hero has had some trouble and my brothers and sisters were almost harmed," he embarrassedly said. "Even if I want to do that, Big Brother certainly wouldn't let me." Everybody laughed hearing his response.

"Very well, this business is settled," said Yang Guo. "Now you can continue your fight." He moved aside and together with his eagle they were ready to be the spectators of the Shi Brothers versus the Xishan Ghost's battle.

Fan Yiweng moved a few steps forward and said to Shi Bowei, "The Xishan Ghosts have met an ill-fated event today, and we are hurting; therefore, we'll have to ask for your leave. However, may we know where your Beastly Mountain Village will be: in Shanxi or Liangzhou? The reason I asked, is so that we can pay a visit in the future."

Shi Bowei understood the threat very well, he said, "We will wait for your visit in Liangzhou. But if ... if ... my third brother can't be saved because of this, you don't have to come to Liangzhou; the four of us will certainly pay you a visit wherever you are."

Fan Yiweng was shocked. "What have we to do with Third Brother's illness?" he wondered.

Shi Bowei's face turned red and he shouted, "My Third Brother..." Shi Shugang sighed, "Eldest Brother, never mind. The Xishan Ghosts' actions were unintentional; it is your younger brother's fate. We don't have to add unnecessary enmity."

Shi Bowei struggled to control himself and said, "Fine!" He lifted one hand toward Fan Yiweng and said, "The green hill will not

change; the green water always flows; we will meet again.” He turned to Yang Guo and said, “Eagle Hero, even if we train for another 30 years we are still not your match. We admit defeat. We will never dare to cross your path again.”

Yang Guo laughed, “There’s no need for that.”

Fan Yiweng was feeling uncomfortable with what had been said and asked, “Eldest Brother Shi, please wait. The Third Brother Shi said we unintentionally did something wrong. What did we do besides entering your territory without authorization? We, the Xishan Ghosts are not afraid to lose our heads; we are certainly not afraid to kowtow to apologize to you.”

Shi Bowei had seen that when they were under the animal’s attack they were throwing the fur hat to each other. Each one of them certainly did not fear death. They were also the kind of people who knew right from wrong. So mournfully he said, “You frightened off the ‘Nine-Tailed Spirit Fox’ [jiu wei ling hu] which my Third Brother needs for treatment of his internal injury. Even if we kill you a thousand times, or even ten thousand times, what good would that be?” Fan Yiweng was shocked; he recalled how the Shi Brothers were leading a large pack of animals to pursue that little fox and wondered why the fox was so important to them.

The Killer Ghost said, “What’s the use of this little fox? Mmm ... since it is important to the Third Brother’s well-being, let us join forces and capture that small fox. Wouldn’t it be great?”

Shi Jiqiang shouted, “What do you mean ‘great’? If you can catch that fox I will kowtow to you a hundred times, no, a thousand times!” He was getting emotional.

Fan Yiweng thought, “The Shi Brothers are animal experts without equal in the world. If THEY say it is difficult, what chance would other people have?” Thinking this he involuntarily cast a glance at Yang Guo.

Guo Xiang could not contain herself any longer. “Why do you keep talking? Why don’t you ask the Eagle Hero for help?” she

interjected.

Shi Zhongmeng's heart was stirred; he thought, "This Eagle Hero is highly skilled, maybe he really can help us." But he said, "What do you know? Unless 'da luojin xian' [the Great Golden Immortal surnamed Luo - I think he is one of Taoist deities] comes down to earth, who else would be able to catch that animal?" Yang Guo knew he deliberately provoked him; so he simply smiled.

Guo Xiang said, "What's so special about the fox? Would the Second Shi Uncle care to explain?"

Shi Zhongmeng sighed and said, "Toward the end of the year before last my Third Brother defended against injustice in Liangzhou, but the enemy was playing dirty. My Third Brother was not careful and was severely injured ..."

Guo Xiang said, "The Third Uncle Shi's skills are good. Who's capable of hurting him?"

Shi Shugang said, "You're flattering me. My skill is like the faint glow of a firefly compared to the sun. What you just said, I am afraid The Eagle Hero would laugh to my face."

Guo Xiang cast a glance at Yang Guo and said, "Him? He is different. I am talking about other people here."

Shi Zhongmeng said, "It was a Mongolian Prince called Hou Du. I heard he is the disciple of Jinlun Fawang."

Yang Guo softly sighed, "It was he. No wonder."

Guo Xiang said, "Eagle Hero, please punish this Mongolian Prince severely for Third Uncle Shi's sake."

Shi Zhongmeng said, "We do not dare to bother the Eagle Hero. As soon as the Third Brother's injury is cured, we will find him and fight him fair and square. I am sure we won't be defeated. Only my Third Brother's internal injury will need a long time to heal; additionally, he will need to drink the blood of the fox for treatment."

"So that's the story," Guo Xiang and the Xishan Ghosts murmured.

Shi Zhongmeng said, "The 'jiu wei ling hu' is a rare animal; extremely skittish. We, five brothers have spent almost a year trying to track it down. This fox's habitat is also in unusual places, like a big marsh located about thirty li [about 15 km] northwest."

The Killer Ghost asked, "Big marsh? Is it the Black Dragon Marsh?"

Shi Zhongmeng said, "Precisely. You have lived in the Jinnan area for a long time, naturally you know that place. This Black Dragon Marsh's surrounding area is covered with sludge for a few li around it; no man or beast is able to live there. It's been a very big effort on our part to simply lure one to this forest."

The Killer Ghost said, "Oh, no wonder you wouldn't allow us to enter the forest."

Shi Zhongmeng continued, "We Shi Brothers are newcomers to this area, naturally we can't act impolitely. But this is an urgent matter; we did not have any other choice. That fox can run very fast, you have seen it with your own eyes. We led the animals to surround this forest and had actually hoped we would catch it. Unexpectedly you lighted a fire in the forest that our animals were afraid of, and, using that opportunity, the fox escaped. We are ashamed that even with all our might we weren't able to catch that animal. Once the fox went back to its lair I doubt if we will ever be able to lure it out again. In the meantime my Third Brother's injury is not getting better. We are running out of time. That was the reason we acted unreasonably." He then looked at Yang Guo imploringly.

Fan Yiweng said, "We are partly responsible for this mishap. But may I know, how did you lure the fox in the first place? Why can't we repeat it?"

Shi Zhongmeng said, "The fox is a very suspicious animal; it was extremely difficult to lure it out. We have sacrificed more than a

thousand roosters. We put a roasted chicken every day a few feet apart. Only after about two months did its suspicions gradually subside and we slowly led it to this forest. After this incident, I doubt it would ever fall into our trap again, even in ten years."

Fan Yiweng nodded, saying, "That is so. But what if we try to capture it in its lair?"

"The Black Dragon Marsh is surrounded by several li of more than ten foot deep sludge. Nothing can step on it, not even a boat or light wooden raft will float. The fox's body is light, its feet wide and thick, plus it is agile so it can run on the surface," Shi Zhongmeng explained.

Guo Xiang suddenly remembered her family's pair of eagles which she and her siblings used to ride in the air. The Divine Eagle is bigger than theirs, capable of carrying two people; hence she said, "Eagle Hero, if you are willing to help, I have a way."

Yang Guo smiled and said, "The Shi Brothers are animal experts, yet they were not able to catch it, even if I am willing what could I do?"

Shi Zhongmeng heard willingness in his voice. This was a matter of life and death for his brother, so without hesitation he bent his knees and knelt down on the snow in front of Yang Guo and asked, "Eagle Hero, my younger brother's fate is in your hand. Please help us." Shi Bowei, Shi Jiqiang and Shi Mengjie also knelt down.

Yang Guo quickly lifted them up and said, "I do not dare." Then he turned to Guo Xiang, "You said if I am willing then you have a way. I will listen to your respected opinion."

Guo Xiang said, "You can ride on the Divine Eagle and fly over the marsh."

Yang Guo laughed heartily, saying, "Ha-ha-ha, my Brother Eagle is different from other birds; his body is too heavy, he can't fly. His strong wings can sweep tigers or leopards away, but they

won't help him soar." Still, he turned his head to the Shi Brothers and said, "Even though I am useless, I will try my best to help. I beg your forgiveness if I am inadequate."

The Shi Brothers were very happy. They knew this well-known hero's reputation; he would do what he promised to do. And if he couldn't do it, nobody could. Shi Bowei and his brothers kowtowed and said, "Then we invite the Eagle Hero and the Xishan Ghosts to draw up a plan together at our place."

Fan Yiweng said, "This trouble was started by our brother. We will listen to you."

Shi Bowei said, "We don't dare accuse him. At least we made a few friends out of this." The Xishan Ghosts and Shi Brothers did not have any enmity to begin with; now that they have agreed on something, each uttered polite words and their enmity was quickly forgotten.

Yang Guo, however, disagreed. "Brothers, let me go directly to the Black Dragon Marsh. No matter if I succeed or fail, I will come and pay my respects to you within five days." The Xishan Ghosts and the Shi Brothers knew he usually handled matters alone; so even though they wanted to come they did not dare to propose otherwise. Yang Guo lifted his arm in respect and turned around, heading north.

Guo Xiang thought, "I came to see the Eagle Hero and I've seen him now. Although he looks ugly, his skills are astonishing and he likes to help those in need; he's a real hero. So if I am looking for a 'Da Xia', I have found one." She was curious to see how he would catch the fox so she quietly followed him.

The Big Head Ghost was about to call her, but changed his mind at the last moment. "She came to see the Eagle Hero; perhaps she has something to say to him," he thought. The Shi Brothers did not know Guo Xiang to begin with, so they did not say anything either.

Guo Xiang was following about ten feet behind Yang Guo. However, Yang Guo and the eagle moved faster and faster like a

speeding horse; a moment later Guo Xiang was far behind. All she could see was Yang Guo's sleeve floating in the wind; the distance between them was getting greater and greater. Guo Xiang used her family's lightness skill with all her might but very soon all she could see was two spots on the horizon. She anxiously cried, "Hey, wait for me!" She lost her concentration and fell onto the snowy ground. She was upset and started to cry.

Suddenly she heard a gentle voice saying, "Why are you crying? Who bullied you?"

Guo Xiang looked up and saw that it was Yang Guo. She did not know how he could get back that fast. She was both surprised and happy, but also embarrassed. She searched for her handkerchief to dry her tears but it was gone. She thought it fell to the ground because she was running frantically.

Yang Guo groped in his sleeve pocket and produced a handkerchief which he held between his thumb and index finger and asked with a smile, "Are you looking for this?" Guo Xiang saw that it was her own embroidered flower handkerchief so she said, "It is you who bully me."

"How did I bully you?" Yang Guo asked.

"You took my handkerchief away, didn't you bully me?" Guo Xiang answered.

Yang Guo laughed, "You dropped it yourself and I was kind enough to pick it up for you. How could you say I took it away?"

Guo Xiang also laughed, "I was behind you, so how could you have picked it up? Obviously you took it from me." Actually Yang Guo was aware that Guo Xiang was following them. He wanted to test her skills; so he intentionally ran faster. He thought this young girl's martial arts seemed to come from a famous expert. After she fell he was afraid she might be injured, so he took a detour around her and saw a handkerchief several feet behind, so he picked it up.

Yang Guo smiled, "What's your name? Who's your master? Why are you following me?"

Guo Xiang countered, "What's your great name? You tell me first then I'll tell you."

Yang Guo had been unwilling to even reveal his face for the past decade, so obviously he was not going to tell a stranger his name. He said, "Young lady, you're a strange one. If you won't say it, then never mind. Here's your handkerchief." He waved his hand slightly and the handkerchief spread out and flew steadily to Guo Xiang.

Guo Xiang found it fun and took it, saying, "Eagle Hero, what skill is this? Can you teach me?"

Yang Guo saw that she was young and innocent and his repulsive mask did not scare her, so he thought, "I must scare her a bit." He suddenly said sharply, "You're very daring. Why aren't you afraid of me? I'm going to hurt you now." He stepped forward and raised his hand as if about to strike.

Guo Xiang was shocked but recovered quickly and laughed, "I'm not afraid. If you really want to hurt me, would you say it first? The Eagle Hero is chivalrous and valiant, why would you want to hurt a little girl like me?"

For someone past caring about worldly affairs, even if a great man praised him sincerely, he would not care. Although he was not desperate to be praised, when he heard Guo Xiang earnestly complimenting him, he smiled, "You don't know me, and how do you know I won't harm you?"

Guo Xiang said, "Although I don't know you, I heard a lot about your great deeds at Fenglingdu last night. I said to myself, 'I must definitely meet such a great hero.' So I followed the Big Head Ghost here to find you."

Yang Guo shook his head, "I'm no hero. After you've seen me you'll know that my fame is exaggerated."

Guo Xiang quickly said, "No, no! If you're not a hero... then who is?" After she said this she realized she said something wrong – it implied her father was not on the same level as he was. So she said, "Of course there're several great heroes apart from you, but you're definitely one of them."

Yang Guo thought, "You're just a teenager, how can you know about the great men of the time?" He smiled, "So who are those heroes?"

Guo Xiang felt that his tone was quite dismissive of her statement, so she said, "OK, I'll say it. But if I'm right, you'll take me to catch that "Nine-Tailed Fox", OK?"

Yang Guo said, "OK. Name me a few."

Guo Xiang said, "OK. There's one hero who defends Xiangyang and repels the Mongol invaders with all his might to protect the people. Is that a great hero?"

Yang Guo held up his thumb and said, "Correct! Hero Guo Jing can be counted."

Guo Xiang continued, "There's also a female hero who protects the people, defends the country, is really intelligent and predicts like the Gods. Is she a great hero?"

Yang Guo said, "You mean Madam Guo – Chief Huang? Hmm... she can be considered a great hero too."

Guo Xiang said, "There's also an old hero who's a master of the Five Elements and the Divine Flicking Finger and is a great prodigy. Is he considered a great hero?"

Yang Guo said, "This must be Island Master Huang, a senior in the Wulin community. I've always respected him."

Guo Xiang saw that he knew the three people she mentioned so she was quite pleased with herself. She said, "Then there's yet another, he commands the Beggars' Sect, kills the mighty enemy, serves the country and the people, and toils laboriously. Is he considered a great hero?"

Yang Guo said, "Are you referring to Chief Lu Youjiao? Although his martial arts are not that fantastic and he never accomplished much, but based on you saying he 'kills the mighty enemy, serves the country and the people', he can be counted as a great hero too."

Guo Xiang thought, "You're so great yourself and your standards are so high; if I continue then you may not agree. Moreover after Father, Mother, Grandfather and Uncle Lu, I can't think of anyone else."

Yang Guo saw her hesitating and thought, "Uncle Guo, Aunt Guo, Island Master Huang and Chief Lu are all very well-known heroes. It's nothing strange for this young lady to mention them." He said, "If you can name one more correctly, I'll take you to the Black Dragon Marsh to catch the "Nine-Tailed Fox"."

Guo Xiang wanted to mention her brother-in-law Yelu Qi but felt that although his martial arts were high, he did not qualify to be a 'great hero' yet. Her martial brothers Wu Dunru and Wu Xiuwen were even worse candidates. She was greatly troubled when she suddenly thought of something and said, "OK, here's one more: he helps people in trouble, protects the weak and is widely praised - the Eagle Hero! Whether he is to be considered a great hero is for you to decide."

Yang Guo said, "Young lady, your words are very amusing."

Guo Xiang said, "So are you taking me to the Black Dragon Marsh?"

Yang Guo laughed, "Since you called me a great hero, how can a great hero disappoint the young lady? Let's go."

Guo Xiang was overjoyed and stretched out her hand and held his left hand. She was friendly with the heroes in Xiangyang since young and they treated her like their goddaughter, hence she did not pay attention to the proper behavior between males and females. In her excitement, she did not treat Yang Guo as a stranger.

Yang Guo, feeling his hand being held by her, felt that it was soft and smooth. He was at a loss as to what to do because if he withdrew his hand, it might have seemed rude. He glanced at her and saw her hopping and skipping with joy written all over her face and without any other thoughts, so he smiled and pointed north, saying, "The Black Dragon Marsh is over there; it's not very far from here." As he pointed, he managed to take his hand away from Guo Xiang's hold discreetly. Yang Guo was a great flirt when young but after separating from Xiao Longnu, he restrained himself. He paid great attention to the proper behavior between males and females for the past 10 years while roaming Jianghu. Although he saw that Guo Xiang was sweet and innocent, he was still careful with his behavior and did not even dare to touch her hand.

Guo Xiang did not bother about that but walked shoulder-to-shoulder with him. After walking a few steps, she saw that although the Divine Eagle was ugly, it looked proud and majestic, so she stretched out her hand to pat its wings. She'd played with a pair of white eagles since young and patting the eagles' wings as a game. However the Divine Eagle spread its wings and pushed her aside with an "Aak". Guo Xiang was shocked and exclaimed, "Ah!"

Yang Guo laughed, "Brother Eagle, relax! Why treat this young lady so coldly?" Guo Xiang stuck out her tongue at it and walked to Yang Guo's right, not daring to go near the eagle. She did not know that while her eagles were pets Yang Guo's eagle was sort of his master as well as his friend. Considering its age, it was an elder, so its status was different.

So the two people and the eagle headed towards the Black Dragon Marsh. They found it quite easily as there was no plants or trees for 7 or 8 li. The Black Dragon Marsh was originally a large lake, but the water source dried eventually and it was clogged with slit year after year. As a result, the place became a desolate marsh. With only a bit of effort, Yang Guo and Guo Xiang made it to the marsh. They looked around and saw a heavy cloud of mist with only dried bushes scattered around the vast

marsh. The “Nine-Tailed Fox”, should be hiding somewhere around here.

Yang Guo took a twig and threw it into the marsh. At first the twig settled on the snow, but then it sank slowly and steadily without stopping. Soon there was not a trace of the twig. Guo Xiang exclaimed, “The twig is so light and yet it sank, so how can we walk on it?” She stared at Yang Guo and wondered what clever tricks he was thinking of.

Yang Guo broke off two yew branches which were a few feet long and tied them to his feet. He said, “Let me try it and see if this works.” He bent forward and jumped onto the snow, skiing quickly on the surface. He skied left and right without pausing and turned several times on the frozen marsh before returning to his original location.

Guo Xiang laughed, “Great skills!”

Yang Guo saw the glint of admiration in her eyes and knew she was really eager to trap the fox, but she did not have great lightness skills so he laughed, “I promised to take you to the Black Dragon Marsh to catch that “Nine-Tailed Fox”, are you afraid?”

Guo Xiang sighed gently and said, “I don’t have skills such as yours; even if I were very brave it’d be useless.”

Yang Guo smiled without a word and broke off another two branches. He then gave them to Guo Xiang and said, “Tie them to your feet.”

Guo Xiang was surprised and delighted and immediately tied the branches as instructed. Yang Guo said, “Bend forward and remember not to exert any strength with your feet.” He grabbed her arm and shouted, “Fear not!” Guo Xiang was dragged by him and she found herself skiing on the snow. She panicked at first, but after a few meters she felt herself floating like the wind and she repeatedly shouted, “This is so much fun!”

After skiing for some time, Yang Guo suddenly shouted, "Oh!" Guo Xiang asked, "What?" She lost her concentration and her left foot sank into the snow. The mud splashed onto her leg and she exclaimed in surprise. Yang Guo lifted her out and said, "Remember, always move continuously and you must not stop suddenly."

Guo Xiang said, "OK. What do you see? Is it the 'Nine-Tailed Fox'?"

Yang Guo said, "No! It seems like someone is living in the middle of the marsh."

Guo Xiang curiously asked, "How can someone live here?"

Yang Guo said, "I don't know that either. But the plants and trees here are arranged into some sort of formation; definitely man-made."

They were getting closer to the formation and Guo Xiang looked carefully, saying, "Correct, Wood at the east, Fire in the south, Earth at the centre but it's not Water at the North but Metal."

She had heard her mother talk of the 'Changes of the Five Elements' since young so she managed to pick up some of it. Her character was quite different to her sister Guo Fu – she was frank but not uncouth and she was much more intelligent than her sister. Huang Rong always said, "If your grandfather ever saw you, he would really like you a lot." Huang Yaoshi was very well-versed in medicine, astrology, the arts and warfare. Guo Xiang was very much like her grandfather but she was distracted easily, so her martial arts improvement was slow. She was always day-dreaming, did as she pleased and her conduct was usually extraordinary, causing Guo Jing and Huang Rong a lot of headaches. Hence her nickname at home was "Little Eastern Heretic". For example on this occasion she followed the Big Head Ghost whom she did not know to look for the Eagle Hero, and now she followed another stranger, the Eagle Hero, to catch the fox. She boldly did as she wanted and was different from the Huang Rong and Guo Fu of years ago.

When Yang Guo heard that she knew how the formation was arranged, he was quite surprised and asked, "How did you know? Who taught you?"

Guo Xiang laughed, "I saw that in some books, I don't even know if it's correct. But from what I see there's nothing extraordinary about this formation, so it can't be some expert living in there."

Yang Guo nodded, "That a person can survive in such an inhospitable place is strange." So he said loudly, "My friend in the Black Dragon Marsh, you have guests." After waiting a while, there was still no response. Yang Guo repeated his words but still received no response. Yang Guo said: "Looks as though someone made this formation, but the person doesn't live here. Let's go over and take a look." He skied several meters ahead and went right up to the formation.

Guo Xiang suddenly felt as though she had set foot on solid ground. Yang Guo finished his examination and laughed, "There's nothing weird about this. There's an island in the middle of the marsh." As he said this, there was a sudden movement in the snow and two little foxes came out from behind a bush. It was a pair of "Nine-Tailed Foxes" and one headed northeast while the other headed southwest, both running very fast.

Yang Guo shouted, "Stay here and don't move." He turned and chased the fox heading northeast. Now that he didn't have to look after Guo Xiang, he was able to utilize his full skills and ski on the snow swiftly as a bird. However the fox was extremely fast and agile too and it turned, and then dashed in front of Guo Xiang. Suddenly, as the wind blew, Yang Guo threw out his sleeve and almost caught the fox but it was too agile and somersaulted in midair, causing Yang Guo's sleeve to miss only by a few inches. Guo Xiang exclaimed, "What a pity!"

The man and the fox dashed through the snow with lightning speed and Guo Xiang was filled with excitement and could not stop cheering Yang Guo, shouting, "Eagle Hero! Faster! Little fox, you can't escape, just surrender!" The other fox zigzagged around, sometimes moving close to Yang Guo. Yang Guo knew it

was there to distract him so he did not bother with it and only concentrated on the first fox, wanting to tire it out. Although the fox was small, its stamina was excellent and showed no signs of fatigue after dashing around for so long.

Yang Guo increased his pace and the other fox ran alongside its companion in an attempt to save it. He scolded, "You little animal, do you think I can't catch you?" He swiftly bent down and grabbed a ball of snow and squashed it until it was like a stone. He shot the snowball out and hit the fox in the head, causing it to fall down and roll over. Yang Guo did not want to kill it, so he threw the snowball very lightly. The fox rolled several times and stood up again, quickly dashing into a clump of bushes, not daring to come out again.

If Yang Guo hit it again, he could catch the fox, but he purposely wanted to compete with it, saying, "Little fox, if I hit you hard with a snowball, you won't die in peace. I'm an upright man and if I can't catch up with you, I'll let you off." He took a deep breath and launched himself forward, sliding on the snow and got right up to the fox. The fox was shocked and tried to escape to the right. Yang Guo was prepared for that and shot out his sleeve, hitting the fox. He then grabbed its head with his left hand. He felt proud of himself and laughed heartily.

When he stopped laughing, he saw that the fox was motionless and appeared to be dead. Yang Guo thought, "Oh no! My sleeve must have hit it too hard. These foxes are very delicate, I wonder if the dead fox's blood can be used to treat the third Shi." He took the fox and skied to Guo Xiang, saying, "This fox is dead, I'm afraid it's of no use to us, let's go catch the live one." He dropped the fox onto the ground, and as he was afraid it was pretending to be dead, he flung his sleeve out to catch it back if it moved. But the fox remained motionless and seemed to be really dead.

Guo Xiang said, "The fox was cute when alive, maybe it dropped dead from fatigue." She took a branch and said, "I'll go chase the other fox here. You wait here." She walked a few steps forward and hit the bushes with the branch.

When she hit the bushes, she wanted to hit again but could not lift the branch up. It seemed like the branch was being bitten by some animal. She exclaimed in surprise and tugged harder, but she lost her grip and the branch was dragged into the bushes.

With a strange sound a person emerged from behind the bushes; it was an old woman with white hair and dressed in black. She stared at Guo Xiang fiercely and raised the branch to hit her. Guo Xiang was shocked and immediately jumped back, retreating behind Yang Guo.

At this time the 'dead' fox sprang up and jumped into the old woman's embrace and stared at Yang Guo with its beady eyes. It was feigning death after all.

When Yang Guo saw this, he was angry yet amused. He thought, "Today I lost to a small animal; seems like it belongs to the old woman. I don't know who she is and I've never heard about such a person in Jianghu. It might be a problem if I insist on taking the fox." He lifted his hand and said, "I have offended you, Elder, please forgive me."

The old woman stared at the branches on their feet and appeared surprised. However she quickly masked it and waved her hand, saying, "This old woman lives in seclusion and doesn't entertain any guests. Go away!" Her pitch was sharp and thin and her brows showed traces of an unfriendly aura.

Yang Guo saw that her appearance was intimidating but her brows and eyes were delicate, so it seemed she must have been beautiful when young. He really could not figure out who this could be and said politely, "I have a friend who has suffered some internal injuries. I need the blood of the "Nine-Tailed Fox" to treat him. I hope you will be generous and save a life. My friends and I will be very grateful to you."

The old woman faced the sky and laughed, "Ha-ha ha-ha heh heh." She did not stop for a while and her laughter was filled with hatred. Finally she said, "He has suffered internal injuries, so you

need to save him. Wonderful! Why did no one want to save my son when he was severely injured?"

Yang Guo was shocked and said, "What injuries did Elder's son suffer? Can we still save him in time?"

The old woman laughed again. She said, "In time? He died several decades ago and has already turned to ashes, what are you talking about?"

Yang Guo knew she was thinking about her past, so he did not say much. He only said, "Our visit here to request this fox is really inappropriate, if elder has any orders I shall carry them out if they're within my capacity."

The old woman cast a gaze at him and said, "I live here alone and have no kith or kin – only these foxes as companions. If you take them away, it's no problem, but you must leave this girl here to accompany me for ten years."

Yang Guo frowned but before he could answer, he heard Guo Xiang say, "This place is only stinking mud and firewood, it's no fun here. I don't want to live here. If you're bored here, then you may come to my home. My parents will definitely welcome you and you can live with us for ten or twenty years. Isn't that better?"

The old woman angrily said, "Who do you think your parents are? How can they invite me?" Guo Xiang was very broad-minded and if anyone was rude to her, she would just laugh it off, so she hardly got angry. The woman seriously offended Guo Jing and Huang Rong and if Guo Fu had heard this, she would have flown into a rage immediately. Guo Xiang however just smiled and stuck out her tongue at Yang Guo.

Yang Guo felt this young lady was very familiar and did not wish to bring her trouble. He nodded to her and faced the old woman, saying, "Elder's invitation to this girl is indeed generous and is a rare opportunity for her but without her parents' permission, she can't decide for herself..."

The old woman said sharply, "Who are her parents? What are you to her?" Yang Guo found these questions hard to answer.

Guo Xiang immediately said, "My parents are villagers, even if I tell you, you wouldn't know them. Him...He's my... brother!" She looked at Yang Guo.

At this time Yang Guo was also starring at her and they made eye contact. Although Yang Guo was wearing a mask and his face looked dead and zombie-like, his eyes radiated a warm and protective aura. Guo Xiang felt her heart tremble and thought, "If I only had such an older brother, he'd definitely look after me. He won't be like my sister who nags and scolds all the time, grumbling about this and nitpicking at that." As she thought of this, her face showed signs of respect.

Yang Guo said, "Yeah, my sister is young and ignorant, so I took her out to see the world..." Guo Xiang was initially afraid that Yang Guo would not acknowledge her as his sister but when she heard this, she was extremely delighted. She heard him continue, "She saw that this "Nine-Tailed Fox" looked so majestic and knew it must be some exalted elder who owns it so she has come with me on this visit. She is really fortunate to meet you."

The old woman laughed coldly, "What's the use of talking such rubbish? The way you chased my fox - is that showing respect for an elder? Quickly go and don't come back!" She waved both palms and thrust one palm at Yang Guo and the other at Guo Xiang. The three of them were standing about a meter apart and although they were out of range of her palms, Guo Xiang felt a cold wind suddenly rush towards her. Yang Guo waved his sleeve and completely dissipated the wind blowing towards Guo Xiang and did not even bother about the wind blowing towards him.

In the beginning, the old woman was not afraid of them and only wanted to chase them out of the Black Dragon Marsh, so she only used 50% of her strength. But when she saw that it did not affect them in the least bit, she was shocked and angry. She increased her strength and struck out with two palms again, not worrying if she took their lives. Once Guo Xiang felt the wind coming, she

felt the chill immediately, but Yang Guo waved his sleeve and dissipated the wind again. She knew they were competing internal strength and she saw that the old woman's expression was terrible while Yang Guo looked calm as he had the upper hand.

The old woman quickly ducked and stepped away, then suddenly lashed out with a strange move, hitting Yang Guo squarely in the chest with a thud. She immediately retreated and did not wait for Yang Guo to retaliate, and was several meters away in a moment. Guo Xiang was shocked and pulled his arm, asking, "Are... are you injured?" The old woman said sharply, "You've been struck by my "Yin Frost Arrow Palm", you won't live to tomorrow. You brought this upon yourself, so don't blame anyone else."

Yang Guo's martial arts had far surpassed this old woman's martial arts even fifteen years ago. Now that he had reached such a high level of internal and external martial arts mastery, the old woman's "Yin Frost Arrow Palm" did not hurt him. However he had no feud with her and he also wanted her precious pet. He did not want to be rude and thus did not retaliate for three palm strikes.

The old woman had trained her "Yin Frost Arrow Palm" for the past two decades and one palm stroke could smash seventeen bricks at once. The shattered pieces did not fly everywhere, showing that her palm strikes were fierce and concentrated. She thought when Yang Guo was hit, he would collapse from his injuries but he smiled as if nothing happened. She thought, "This kid is still stubborn even on the verge of death." She said, "While you're not dead yet, quickly take this girl and leave, don't die in my Black Dragon Marsh."

Yang Guo lifted his head and said clearly, "Elder lives in seclusion and is very knowledgeable." He laughed loudly and clearly, his voice robust and vigorous, showing his profound internal strength.

When the woman heard this, she realized that he was not even slightly injured and her face darkened. It was only now that she

knew he had actually allowed three moves and she was far from his match. She did not wait for him to finish and carried her fox while whistling for the other. The other came out from the bushes and jumped into her embrace. The old woman said sharply, "Martial arts expert, I admire you. But if you want to snatch this old woman's foxes, never! If you step one foot closer I'll strangle them and you can return empty-handed."

Yang Guo heard that her words were resolute and saw that her character was stubborn and unyielding, he hesitated. If he suddenly charged forward and sealed her accupoints before snatching a fox, it looked like she might die from anger. This way, even if he saved Shi Shugang's life, it would be at the expense of another innocent life.

At this time, they heard a voice from behind. "Amitufo." Then the voice said, "Old monk Yideng wishes to see you, Yinggu, please meet me."

Guo Xiang saw that there was no one around her and was very curious. The voice seemed to come from close by but there was nowhere anyone could conceal himself in the surroundings. Where could this person be? She had once heard from her mother that Reverend Yideng was a highly-skilled elder. He had once saved her mother's life and he was also the master of Wu Santong who was the father of the Wu brothers. She had never met him before, so when someone suddenly called himself Yideng, she was surprised and happy.

When Yang Guo heard Yideng's voice, he was very delighted too. He knew that Yideng was now using the "Voice Transmitting Over 1000 Li" skill. Of course Yideng was not literally 1000 li away, but if there was no mountain in the way, someone with high martial arts could project his voice over several li and yet sound very near. The higher the internal energy, the gentler the voice would sound. Yang Guo only heard these two sentences and was full of admiration and admitted to himself that this monk's internal energy was so profound and refined that the monk was superior to him. He then thought, "So this old woman is Yinggu. I wonder

what Yideng wants to see her for. Maybe with his intervention I can get the fox."

The old woman living in the Black Dragon Marsh was indeed Yinggu. Years ago when Yideng was the King of Dali, Yinggu was one of his concubines. She had an affair with Zhou Botong and had a son by him. Later Qiu Qianren used his Iron Palms to injure their son severely but King Duan (Yideng) refused to save the child and he died. Following that King Duan became a monk and took on the name of Yideng. When Yinggu could not kill Qiu Qianren on Mount Hua, she chased Zhou Botong for some time before touring Jianghu and finally settling down in the Black Dragon Marsh. By this time Yideng had been outside the marsh for seven days and transmitted his voice to seek permission to visit her everyday. However Yinggu remembered how he totally refused to save her son many years ago and her hatred had still not diminished, so she refused to see him.

Yang Guo saw Yinggu retreat a few steps and sit on a pile of firewood. Her eyes were filled with hatred. After a while, they heard Yideng again, saying, "Old monk Yideng has come from a thousand li away, Yinggu, please grant us permission to visit." Yinggu just played with her foxes and ignored him. Yang Guo thought, "Yideng's martial arts far surpass hers, so she can't stop him from coming, so why does he beg her to see him?" They heard Yideng repeat the words once more, then they did not hear him again.

Guo Xiang said, "Brother, this Reverend Yideng must be some great man, can we go see him?"

Yang Guo said, "Yes! I want to see him too." Then they saw Yinggu stand up and cast her fierce gaze at them and felt uncomfortable. He grabbed Guo Xiang's hand and said, "Let's go!" They skied away together.

Guo Xiang was pulled for several feet by Yang Guo. Then she asked, "Brother, where's Reverend Yideng? When I heard him speak, it's as though he's right beside me."

Yang Guo heard her call him “Brother” twice and her voice was gentle and sweet, his heart shivered and thought, “I must never let her get entangled in the web of love. This girl is young and naïve and inexperienced, so it’s best we split up soon before there’s any trouble.” But they could not stop in such a desolate place and he could not let go of her hand now. Guo Xiang asked, “I’m asking you, didn’t you hear?”

Yang Guo said, “Reverend Yideng is in the northwest and is several li away from here. He can speak from far as though he’s nearby using the “Voice Transmitting Over 1000 Li” skill.”

Guo Xiang happily asked, “You know it too? Can you teach me? When we’re a thousand li apart I can use this skill to communicate with you, won’t that be great?”

Yang Guo laughed, “Although this is the “Voice Transmitting Over 1000 Li” skill, if you can only project your voice over several li, it would indeed be considered excellent. If you want to reach Reverend Yideng’s level, even with your intelligence you’ll only have mastered it when you have white hair.”

Guo Xiang heard that he was praising her for being intelligent, she was overjoyed and said, “How am I intelligent? If I were only 10% as intelligent as my mother, I’d be satisfied.”

Yang Guo’s heart trembled and he saw that her brows resembled Huang Rong’s, so he thought, “Among all the people I’ve met in my life, whether male or female, when it comes to intelligence none can compare to Aunt Guo. Could she really be Uncle and Aunt Guo’s daughter?” But he laughed nonchalantly and thought, “Is there really such a wonderful thing? If she’s really their daughter, Uncle Guo would never let her come out and wander around like this.” He asked, “Who’s your mother?”

Although Guo Xiang said that her parents were great heroes, now she was shy to admit that she was Guo Jing and Huang Rong’s daughter, so she laughed, “My mother is my mother. You wouldn’t know her anyway. Brother, between you and Yideng, whose skills are better?”

Yang Guo was almost a middle-aged man now and he'd experienced the agony of separation from Xiao Longnu, so his proud nature had waned with age. He said, "Reverend Yideng is a famous character in Wulin and his name is as well-known as the Peach Blossom Island. He was the Southern King among the Five Greats, how can I be compared to him?"

Guo Xiang said, "If you were born several decades earlier, then there would be Six Greats: East Heretic, West Poison, North Beggar, Central Divinity and the Eagle Hero. Ah, there's also Hero Guo and Madam Guo. So there would be Eight Greats."

Yang Guo could not help it anymore and asked, "You've met Hero Guo and Madam Guo before?"

Guo Xiang said, "Of course, they like me a lot. Do you know them personally? After we finish this business, we'll meet them together, OK?"

Yang Guo had already forgotten the incident in which Guo Fu hacked off his arm, but he could not stop hating Guo Fu for poisoning Xiao Longnu and causing their sixteen-year separation. He blandly said, "Next year, I might visit Hero Guo and Madam Guo, but I must meet my wife first, then I'll go with her." When he mentioned Xiao Longnu, he was extremely excited inside.

Guo Xiang suddenly felt his palm become hot and asked, "Your wife must be really beautiful and highly-skilled."

Yang Guo sighed, "There's no one else as beautiful as her on Earth. Hmm, I think she has already far surpassed me in terms of martial arts."

Guo Xiang was full of admiration and said, "Brother, you must take me to meet your wife. Can you promise me that?"

Yang Guo laughed, "Why not? She'll definitely like you a lot. When the time comes you can call me 'Brother'."

Guo Xiang was surprised and asked; "Why not now?" She stopped and her foot sank into the mud again. Yang Guo pulled

her out and skied another few meters. Then they saw a man standing some distance away in the snow. His white beard was flowing freely and he was wearing a loose grey robe. It was indeed Yideng. Yang Guo said in a clear voice, "Disciple Yang Guo greets the Reverend." He dragged Guo Xiang and ran up to him.

He bent his knees as soon as he came near the Reverend.

The place where Yideng stood was beyond the Black Dragon Marsh. Yideng was also very happy and quickly pulled the young man up. "Brother Yang," he said, "How have you been? I am delighted to see your skill has improved thus far."

As soon as he stood up, Yang Guo saw another monk lying on the ground behind the Reverend. The monk's face was sheet white and his eyes were closed; he looked like a corpse. After looking at him for a moment he recognized the monk as Ci'en. He was surprised and asked "What happened to Reverend Ci'en?"

Yideng heaved a heavy sigh. "He has been injured by an enemy and my efforts to help him were in vain," he said.

Yang Guo quickly checked Ci'en's pulse and found it was very weak. He knew that Ci'en would have been dead if he did not possess profound internal energy. "Reverend Ci'en has a very high level of martial arts. Your disciple is puzzled as to how could he be injured that badly?"

"For a long time he and I lived a secluded life in Hunan province," explained Yideng. "A while ago we heard that, because they were not successful in taking over Xiangyang, the Mongolians had turned their attention to the south. They attacked Da Li with the intention of using it as a stepping stone to attack the central plains from both north and south. Because he saw my concern about the safety of my homeland, Ci'en went out to investigate. Unexpectedly he met an enemy and was engaged in a battle for one whole day and night. As a result he suffered a heavy injury."

Yang Guo stomped his feet. With a sigh he said "Jinlun Fawang has come back to the central plains," he said.

"Big Brother, how did you know the enemy was Jinlun Fawang? Reverend Yideng did not say it was him," asked Guo Xiang.

"I guessed it was Jinlun Fawang because the Reverend said they were battling each other for one whole day and night," he answered. "From what the Reverend said, Ci'en was not injured by some kind of trickery and the number of people who can do that is only a handful. Among those people, Jinlun Fawang is the only one."

"Big Brother," Guo Xiang said, "Please find that man and avenge Senior Monk."

At that moment Ci'en slowly opened his eyes. He looked at Guo Xiang and shook his head. "What is it? You don't want revenge?" asked the girl. "Ha! You worry that Big Brother will lose?"

"Little Miss has guessed incorrectly," Yideng said. "My disciple has committed many crimes in the past. He had repented of his past sins and done so many good deeds to repay those sins. There is only one thing disturbing his heart. Without resolution he will die with regrets. He doesn't want revenge; he doesn't want his enemy's demise. All he wants is someone's forgiveness. Then he will close his eyes in peace."

"Does he want the forgiveness of that granny who lives in the middle of the marsh?" asked the girl. "That granny is so hardhearted. She won't easily forgive you if you offended her."

Yideng again heaved a heavy sigh. "That's true," he said. "We have camped out here for seven whole days and nights. She still has not responded!"

Yang Guo was surprised. He suddenly remembered the granny mentioned something about her child, whom she said was injured but nobody was willing to help. "Is this about the death of a child?" he asked.

Yideng slightly shivered. "So Brother Yang knows," he said.

"Disciple does not know the details," said Yang Guo. "I said that because the granny mentioned it." He proceeded by narrating the reason for his visit to the Black Dragon Marsh and his conversation with the granny.

"She was my wife, her name is Yinggu," said Yideng softly. "She has a very strong character ..." he sighed "If this situation persists, Ci'en won't be able to hold on."

Yang Guo sighed and sadly said, "Who has never done anything wrong? Whenever somebody repents, all could be forgotten. Yinggu is rather shortsighted."

Seeing Ci'en was nearing his end, Yang Guo's valiant character was stirred. "Reverend, by ignoring my meager ability, I would like to force her to come out," he said. "Will you allow me?"

Yideng thought for a moment, "Ci'en and I have come this far to ask Yinggu's forgiveness. We can't force her, but we have been here a long time without meeting her and looks like our effort will be in vain. If this Yang Guo has any ideas, we might as well try them. Worst case is we still cannot meet her." So finally he said, "If Brother Yang could persuade her to come out, I would be delighted. But in your efforts, I wish for you not to cause any trouble and worsen this already deep hatred."

Yang Guo nodded and took a handkerchief and tore it into four pieces. He put two pieces in Ci'en's ears and gave the other two to Guo Xiang; signaling her to put them in her ears. Guo Xiang understood and immediately did as she was told.

Yang Guo then exerted his internal energy and gathered his 'chi' in his 'dan tian'. [The 'dan tian' is somewhat below the navel and between the kidneys. It's somewhere in the centre of the cross-section of the body. All the 'chi' arises from this central point].

He bowed in front of Yideng and said, "Disciple will show off my lack of ability, I hope Reverend won't laugh at me."

Yideng clasped his hands and said, "Not many people in this world can match Brother Yang's skill. This old monk has long

wanted to see it.”

Yang Guo put his hand on his waist, looked up, and he shouted loud and long. The shout was loud and sharp, slowly becoming unbearable. It was like earth shattering thunderbolts. Even though her ears were stopped, Guo Xiang’s heart pounded and her face paled. Not too long after there came a sound like the waves of the tide, continuously crashing onto the shore. One after another, the next one was louder than the previous one.

“Big Brother, stop! I can’t take it any longer!” shouted Guo Xiang. But her cries were overcome by Yang Guo’s cry so that she could not even hear her own voice. She felt like her spirit was snatched out and her body was swaying. At that time she suddenly felt Yideng holding her hand and out of his hand came a warm energy flowing into her body. Guo Xiang understood Yideng was helping her with his profound internal energy. Therefore, she quickly exerted her own energy and calmed her perturbed heart. A moment later her heart was steadied and her mind cleared.

After the time needed to eat a bowl of rice Yang Guo’s voice had not weakened. On the contrary, the intensity was increased. Yideng was very impressed, because he had not achieved that level when he was Yang Guo’s age.

In the time it took to light a joss stick a black shadow came out of the Black Dragon Marsh; immediately Yang Guo shook his sleeve and stopped the roar.

“Emperor Duan,” a voice was heard. “You are too much! You forced me to come out. What do you want?”

“It wasn’t me. It was Brother Yang’s voice,” said Yideng.

While still speaking the shadow kept coming near and when it stopped, all could see that it was Yinggu.

She looked puzzled. “Is that true, that there is someone besides Emperor Duan who possesses internal energy that profound?” she asked in her heart. “Even though he is wearing a mask, I can

tell from his hair that he is only thirty-something. It's amazing for him to reach this level."

She was forced to come out of her lair by the loud roar. She realized that if she refused, the roar would get louder and she will be heavily injured, possibly her nervous system ruined. So even though she was irritated, she had to comply. Little did she know that the roar came out of Yang Guo's throat.

After calming herself she turned to Yang Guo and coldly said, "Take my fox. I admit defeat. But I want you to leave immediately." She lifted the fox by the scruff of its neck and gave it to Yang Guo.

"Hold a moment," Yang Guo said. "The fox can wait. Reverend Yideng wants to talk to you. Please listen to him."

Yinggu looked coldly at Yideng. "Very well, I await the Emperor's decree."

"Let bygones be bygones," said Yideng. "Why do you still use that term? Yinggu, do you know him?" He pointed to Ci'en who was still lying on the ground.

Ci'en was wearing a monk's robe. His face had changed much from the Mount Hua [Huashan] Sword Meet of 30 years ago. Yinggu looked at him for a minute and then said, "How would I know this monk?"

"Who hurt your son then?" Yideng asked.

The granny's body shuddered, her fair countenance turned red, and from red it turned back to white. "That scoundrel Qiu Qianren," she answered. "Even if he's turned into dirt I will still remember him."

"It has been decades yet you have not rid your heartache." Yideng sighed. "This man is none other than Qiu Qianren. You don't recognize his face any longer, but your heart is still full of hatred."

Yinggu leaped and stretched her fingers like claws, she was going to pierce Ci'en's breast. Before her hands reached their target, she looked at him again. That face only slightly resembled the Qiu Qianren that she knew. He was lying motionless, no different than a corpse. "If he really is Qiu Qianren, why did he want to see me?" she asked doubtfully.

"He is indeed Qiu Qianren," explained Yideng. "He repented his great and many sins, shaved his head and became my disciple. His Buddhist name is Ci'en."

The granny snorted. "Great sinners always think they can redeem their sins by becoming a monk," she said.

"You are wrong," said Yideng patiently. "Sin is sin. By becoming a monk he is still a sinner. But he is heavily injured and is dying. He remembered his sin toward you in the past. He knew he injured your child and his heart is troubled; if he doesn't see you, he won't die peacefully. Therefore, enduring his pain, we have come from thousands of li away to ask for your forgiveness."

The granny looked at Ci'en for a long time. Her eyes shone with unleashed hatred. Guo Xiang was really frightened. Slowly the granny lifted her hands up to hit Ci'en. Even though Guo Xiang was scared, her valiant heart prevailed. "Stop it!" she shouted. "He is heavily injured. It's not proper for you to hit him."

Yinggu coldly laughed. "Not proper?" she asked. "He murdered my child and made me suffer for tens of years. Right now - even though it is a bit late, I have a chance for revenge. Not proper? What do you mean 'not proper'?"

"He has repented and regretted his sins," said the girl. "Why do you insist?"

Yinggu looked up and laughed maniacally. "Child, don't talk rubbish!" she snapped. "What would you do if he killed your child?"

"I ... I ... I don't have a child," Guo Xiang stammered.

The granny made a noise with her nose. "What if he killed your husband, your lover ... your big brother? What would you do?" she asked again.

Guo Xiang blushed. "You talk rubbish," she said, "Where did my husband or my lover come from?"

Yinggu was seething with anger. She ignored the girl and lifted her hands again to hit her archenemy's head. Suddenly Ci'en sighed and opened his eyes. A smile formed on his lips. "Thank you Yinggu, for helping me."

The granny was stunned, her hands stopped mid-air. "Help you what?" she barked. But then she realized Ci'en's intention. She now knew that the monk was dying, he wanted it finished by her hands. 'An eye for an eye'... He would pay his old debt.

Yinggu then coldly laughed. "Hmm! How could you die that easy?" she said. "Now I don't want to kill you, yet I don't want to forgive you either!" That word left her mouth with such a cruelty that all who heard her shivered.

Yang Guo was certain that, as a monk, Reverend Yideng would not use force against his ex-concubine who was mad with anger. Guo Xiang was still too young to be regarded by the granny. He was the only one who could do something, anything. He thought for a moment and then said, "Senior Yinggu, I do not know the details of your enmity toward Ci'en. But I can tell from your words that you are a little bit too involved. Therefore, whether I want it or not, I'll have to intervene."

Yinggu was startled and looked at Yang Guo with flame in her eyes. She recalled her three failed attacks, and she recalled his magnificent roar. She realized her skill was not on par with the Eagle Hero, who, judging from his words, would resort to force against her. She also remembered her suffering. From anger she turned sad, and then sobbed uncontrollably.

Yang Guo and Guo Xiang, even Yideng, were perplexed; they didn't understand why the granny cried. A little while later she said, still sobbing: "You! You wanted to see me and I ignored you,

but you used force against me. But that person is not willing to see me and none of you care about it."

"Who?" asked Guo Xiang quickly, "Who doesn't want to see Senior? We can help you."

"You can only bully women," said Yinggu. "But you are afraid to meet a highly skilled pugilist."

"I am indeed useless," said the girl. "But with Reverend Yideng and Big Brother here, we are not afraid of anything."

After thinking for a while, Yinggu stood up. "If you can bring him to see and talk to me, I will do whatever you want me to do," she said. "You want a fox, you want me to make peace with Qiu Qianren, whatever."

"Big Brother," Guo Xiang turned to Yang Guo. "What do you think?"

"Whom do you want to see? Why is it so difficult?" asked Yang Guo.

"Ask him," said the granny, pointing to Reverend Yideng.

For an instant Guo Xiang thought the granny was blushing. She was surprised and asked in her heart, "She is this old, yet she is still shy?"

Realizing Yang Guo and Guo Xiang were looking at him, Reverend Yideng softly said, "It was the Old Urchin, Brother Zhou Botong."

"The Old Urchin?" Yang Guo asked. He was delighted. "I know the old man well. Very well, I will try to find him."

"My name is Yinggu," the granny said. "You have to tell him up front that the person who wants to see him is me. If not, he will run away as soon as he sees me; and if that happens, don't ever think of finding him again. If you succeed, I will do whatever you want me to."

Yideng was shaking his head. Yang Guo saw that, and realized what he'd got himself into. He guessed that there must be an unusual affair between Yinggu and the Old Urchin that made the old man unwilling to see her. But he also knew that Zhou Botong was capricious and loved to play. Yang Guo hoped to somehow trick him. And so he asked, "Where is the Old Urchin? Does Senior know?"

"If you walk for about two hundred li (around 100km) north, you will arrive at a valley. It's called the 'Hundred-Flower Valley' [bai hua gu]," explained the granny. "He hid himself in the valley, spending his days keeping bees."

Hearing the words 'keeping bees' Xiao Longnu immediately came into Yang Guo's mind. He remembered that sixteen years ago Zhou Botong had learned how to keep the Jade Bees from his wife. Because of this thought tears welled up in his eyes. "Very well," he said. "Junior will try to find him. Please wait here." Having said that he asked a clearer direction to the valley and immediately set foot. Guo Xiang followed behind him.

"You'd better stay here," whispered Yang Guo. "That grandpa has a very high martial arts skill, and he is kindhearted too. You can use this opportunity to ask him for a lesson or two. I believe you will gain tremendous advantage for the rest of your life."

"No, I want to come with you to see Zhou Botong," said the girl.

Yang Guo frowned. "Ah, you are wasting a golden opportunity," he said, regret in his voice.

"After we see Zhou Botong, I can go home alone if you have to go someplace else," said Guo Xiang, "But for now, let me come with you."

Yang Guo was touched. "Ah! If only I had a little sister like her, I wouldn't feel so lonely roaming Jianghu," he said in his heart. He smiled and said, "You didn't have any sleep last night. Aren't you tired?"

"I am, but I still want to come," she answered.

“Very well,” said Yang Guo, grabbing her hand. Utilizing their lightness kungfu they ran to the north.

With Yang Guo pulling her along, Guo Xiang felt she could run faster without using too much energy. “If only I could run this fast without your help,” she said, laughing.

“Your kungfu base is excellent. If you keep training, you will reach this level someday,” said Yang Guo. Suddenly he looked up and shouted. The girl was startled, but then she understood. He was calling his bird. “Brother Eagle,” Yang Guo said, “We need to go north for some business. You’d better come along.” Whether the bird understood his words or not he chirped and followed behind them.

About one li later the eagle ran faster and even with Yang Guo pulling her, Guo Xiang could not keep up. The eagle lost its patience. He bent his knees to make his body shorter. Yang Guo chuckled and said, “Brother Eagle wants to carry you. Say ‘thank you’ to him.”

Guo Xiang did not dare to be disrespectful toward the Divine Eagle. She bowed in reverence and then mounted the bird’s back. The eagle immediately stretched his legs and ran like the wind; Guo Xiang felt like the trees along the way, were dancing past them. Yang Guo exerted his energy and ran alongside them. He talked and told Guo Xiang what he knew about the places they were passing. The girl was ecstatic! She had never experience this much fun. She wished in her heart the eagle would not run too fast so that she could enjoy the ride longer.

About midday they had run for two hundred li. By following Yinggu’s direction they entered a path way between two hills. Beyond this path they found a very beautiful valley. It was beautiful because it was full of colorful flowers. They slowed down and walked leisurely. In between the flower bushes they could see ponds with water clear as the sky. They felt like the place was out of this world.

Guo Xiang clapped her hands and exclaimed, "The Old Urchin is so lucky. How could he find a place this beautiful? Big Brother, how could this place be so pretty?"

"This place is facing south, so the mountains act as a barrier to the cold north wind," explained Yang Guo. "Besides, I think there are sulfur or other mineral springs underground, and that is why the ground is warmer so spring comes early. While other places are still covered with snow, the flowers are already blooming here."

Guo Xiang slid down from the eagle's back and said, "Brother Eagle, many thanks to you." Then she walked side-by-side with Yang Guo entering the valley. After a few turns they saw a couple of stone walls on each side of the path, with three pine trees in between, forming two natural gates. As soon as they came near the gates, they heard buzzing sounds and saw thousands of Jade Bees flying around amidst the trees and flowers.

Yang Guo knew Zhou Botong must be around, so he called, "Old Urchin! Your younger brother Yang Guo and little sister have come to visit you and play."

If we look at the proper level, Yang Guo was actually three levels below the old man. He should have called 'Great Grand Martial Master', but he knew that the old man did not care much about 'propriety' and might not like to be called 'Great Grand Martial Master'; therefore, he called him 'Old Urchin'.

A moment later an old man came out from one of the gates. Yang Guo was startled. He had not seen Zhou Botong for more than ten years. He thought he would see an old man with white hair and beard. Contrary to his thought, Zhou Botong's face had not changed a bit, and his hair and beard had more black than white. In short, Yang Guo saw a younger Zhou Botong!

As soon as he saw Yang Guo, the old man laughed heartily. "Brother Yang, what business do you have with me? Aha! You are wearing a mask to scare me off?" Having said that his hand moved toward Yang Guo's left side to snatch his mask. Yang Guo

lifted up his right shoulder a little bit and slanted his head to the left. Zhou Botong's attack fell to an empty space. The old man was surprised, but he laughed and shouted, "Little Brother! Good! You are really good! I did not reach your level when I was your age."

In that short encounter both experts had exchanged their skills. Zhou Botong's snatch, while it looked like an ordinary snatch, had actually blocked Yang Guo's movement. Even if he were to leap back, he shouldn't be able to elude that attack. If it were not Yang Guo, the opponent would parry the attack with another attack. But Yang Guo had used a more sophisticated move. When he lifted his right shoulder up, his right sleeve made a move like it was going to attack Zhou Botong's chest. As an expert Zhou Botong could see the move and readied himself to fend off the attack. Because his concentration was now split, his snatching power was reduced so Yang Guo was able to neutralize Zhou's snatching by merely slanting his head a little bit. Guo Xiang was inexperienced; she could not see the exchange between these two experts. But she was delighted to hear the old man praising her big brother. "Grandpa Zhou," she said, "Tell me, is your skill higher now than when you were younger, or the other way around?"

"When I was young, my hairs were white, but now my hairs are black," he answered, grinning. "Of course my skill is much higher now than when I was younger."

"If you can't beat my big brother now, how you could beat him then?" said the girl.

Zhou Botong was not offended, he laughed and said, "Little girl, don't speak rubbish!" Suddenly his hands flew toward Guo Xiang's back and waist. He lifted her up to the air, spun her around, threw her up in the air, held her back and slowly put her back on the ground.

His mischievousness had angered the Divine Eagle. Suddenly the eagle swept at Zhou Botong with its wings. Zhou Botong saw the wings' attack and said to himself: "Let me try this winged beast's

strength.” He exerted his energy and fended off with both hands. Crash! Two formidable forces collided. The old man was still standing and the eagle’s wings passed his side. The eagle was about to attack again when Yang Guo suddenly shouted, “Brother Eagle, don’t be rude! We are in the presence of a highly skilled senior.”

The eagle halted his attack and stood proudly still. “His strength is indeed formidable, no wonder he is so arrogant,” said the Old Urchin, laughing heartily.

“Brother Eagle is more than a hundred years old. He is much older than you are,” said Yang Guo. “Uh, Old Urchin, how did you become young again and your hairs turned black?”

The old man laughed heartily. “My hairs and beard have their own will; I cannot control them,” he said. “From black they turned white, and now turned back to black again.”

Guo Xiang giggled hearing his foolhardy answer. “Old Urchin, I think you are going to turn to a young boy,” she said. “After you shrink to a young boy then people will pat your head and call you ‘little brother’. It will be fun!”

Hearing that the old man was worried and he stood staring blankly. Actually, there were a couple of real reasons behind this change of hair color. First, he was always happy, his body was healthy, and his internal energy was profound. Second, he ate a lot of energy-booster foods like Poria mushroom filaments [Fu Ling], Jade Bee’s honey, and the like. But probably the main reason was simply because his body was different from average people; even though his age was close to a hundred, he was not getting weaker, but on the contrary, he was getting stronger.

Listening to their conversation Yang Guo had an idea. “Brother Zhou,” he said. “If you agree to see someone, I guarantee you won’t get smaller.”

“Who...Who?” he asked hastily.

"Before I tell you, you have to promise me one thing," Yang Guo answered, "You have to promise you won't run away as soon as I mention this person's name."

The Old Urchin Zhou Botong was capricious and naïve, but he was not stupid. If he were, how could he reach such a high level in the martial realms? Therefore, as soon as he heard what Yang Guo said, he deduced correctly. "In this whole wide world there are two people I do not dare to see," he said. "The first one is Emperor Duan; the other is Concubine Yinggu. Other than these two, I am not afraid of anybody else."

"Looks like I'll have to provoke him," Yang Guo thought. So he said, "You do not dare to see them because you were defeated at their hands."

"No, it's not like that," the old man contradicted. "Old Urchin sinned against them; that was why I don't have face to see them."

Yang Guo was surprised. Now he understood why the old man acted like he did. Yang Guo tried approaching from a different direction. "They are in grave danger and their lives are threatened," he said. "Do you have the heart not to do anything?"

Zhou Botong was shocked. He loved and respected Yideng and Yinggu very much. If they were in trouble, he wouldn't hesitate to help up to the point of sacrificing his own life. However, he saw Guo Xiang was smiling, and her countenance did not show any sorrow. He realized Yang Guo's trick and laughed heartily. "Are you trying to trick me?" he asked. "Emperor Duan has a very high level of martial arts. How could he be in grave danger? Even if he is facing a formidable enemy and he lost, do you think I could win?"

Yang Guo didn't know what to do. "All right, let me just tell you the truth," he said. "Yinggu has been thinking about you, she wants to see you and talk with you."

The old man's face changed abruptly. "Brother Yang!" he snapped. "If you mention that name one more time, you'll have to leave "bai hua gu". Don't blame me if I don't make an exception."

Even though he had been through a lot of things, Yang Guo was still a proud man. He waved his sleeve and with a loud voice said, "Brother Zhou, I don't think you'll easily achieve your desire to drive me out of this valley."

"Huh! Huh! Do you want to fight with me?" asked the old man.

"Yes, I want to ask a lesson or two from you," he answered. "Let us make a bet: if I lose, I will leave this valley without further ado. But if you lose, you'll have to see Yinggu."

"No! Can't be!" shouted the Old Urchin. "First, how could I lose to a kid? Second, if I did, I still don't want to see Concubine Liu."

"Aren't you ashamed?" asked Yang Guo irritated. "If you win, you are free not to see her, but if you lose, you still don't want to see her, what kind of bet is that?"

"Just shut your mouth up!" snapped the old man. "I don't want to see her, I am not going too. Protect yourself!"

This time the Eagle Hero was really dumbfounded. He could not be persuaded, he could not be forced. If they really fight, Yang Guo didn't have any confidence of victory. He stood there blankly, uncertain of what to do.

As we know, Zhou Botong was crazy about martial arts. Even when he lived alone at the "Hundred-Flower Valley" he trained everyday. He always wanted to find a sparring partner; however, with his high level of martial arts, where could he find a suitable match? Therefore, seeing Yang Guo was willing to spar with him, he was itchy to start the fight. Without wasting a single moment Zhou Botong cried, "Watch out!" and started the fight with his "Vacant Fist". Yang Guo parried with a palm but felt there was something wrong with the power of the fist; it seemed as if it wasn't there. He considered using soft palms as a response but

decided against it, as it would be too risky so he used hard palms even though it wouldn't match. He used the palm techniques that he developed over the years against the tide's waves. Three stances later, flower petals were flying around everywhere and after another three, branches from trees fell. At first Yang Guo was worried that Zhou would not be able to take his fierce and overbearing palm because of his advanced age. He withdrew the power from his palm as soon as he sent it out, but after six stances, Yang Guo knew Zhou's internal energy was very profound and so did not hold anything back. The "Vacant Fist's" ingenuity was above the martial arts that he was using.

"Good! You are very good!" shouted Zhou Botong. "This is a match I have always wanted."

The perimeter of their forces was getting larger as the fight progressed, which forced Guo Xiang to step back. The eagle stayed close to Yang Guo, protecting its breast with its left wing while the right wing was a little bit open. The eagle understood the fierceness of this match and it never took its piercing gaze from Yang Guo, ready to step in if Yang Guo had any trouble.

After a while, Zhou had used all seventy-two stances of his "Vacant Fist". He had the advantage of better technique but his internal energy could not compare with the overbearing and boundless force of Yang Guo. With eyes open wide Guo Xiang watched these two people exchanging blows. She knew they weren't fighting as enemies; still, a fight between two highly skilled martial artists was very unpredictable. The slightest mistake could mean death. Cold sweat poured out of her body.

After seeing his "Vacant Fist" could do nothing to Yang Guo, he secretly praised him and then suddenly changed stances and used his left-right technique to fight. His left and right hands used different fist techniques, so that suddenly, Yang Guo was fighting against two Zhou Botongs.

Yang Guo was already at a disadvantage when it was one hand versus two, now it became even more so. One time, when Xiao Longnu fought Jinlun Fawang, she had just learned the "Dividing

Ones Mind" skill from Zhou. When the couple met again, Yang Guo had lost his right arm. Xiao Longnu was afraid she might make him sad, so she did not say anything about the technique. Yang Guo was slightly alarmed and could only increase the power in his palm and used his sleeve to take some of the attacks.

As somebody who had trained in martial arts since she was little, Guo Xiang did not understand the fist techniques being exchanged, but she could see who had gained the upper hand and who was having difficulty. She was flustered. Then Guo Xiang remembered her father's lesson on the 'Dividing Ones Mind" skill, which he demonstrated before Guo Polu and herself. She saw what Zhou Botong was doing and it looked to her he was using her father's skill. She wasn't sure whether her father learned the skill from this old man, or the other way around. Anyway, she saw an opportunity to give Yang Guo a hand, so she shouted, "Old Urchin! Stop! Not fair! Big Brother does not want to fight you anymore!"

Surprised, Zhou Botong leaped back. "Why not fair?" he snapped. "You stole that skill from my father and used it against Big Brother," she answered. "Aren't you ashamed?"

After hearing the young girl called Yang Gou 'Big Brother' naturally Zhou Botong thought she was Yang Guo's younger sibling. And because he did not know Yang Guo's father, he only laughed and said, "This skill was my own invention. How could you say I stole it from your father?"

"Fine," said the young Miss. "Even if what you said was true, you still used two arms, while Big Brother only has one. Is that fair? If my Big Brother had two arms, you would've been beaten a long time ago."

"What you said is true," the old man confessed. "But I am sure that even if he had two arms; he still could not use this skill of mine." Then he laughed jovially.

Guo Xiang grunted. "Shame on you!" she mocked, "You just said that because you know Big Brother's arm cannot re-grow. If you

are a valiant man (ying xiong), you wouldn't take any advantage of your opponent's disability."

"Fine... In that case I am going to use only a one fist technique," said the old man.

Guo Xiang stuck out her tongue. "Still shame on you, still unfair, because you use two arms against Big Brother's one," she snickered.

"Damn it!" shouted the old man, annoyed. "What should I do then? Shall I ask a woman to chop off one of my arms?"

Guo Xiang was startled, "Which woman had chopped off Big Brother's arm?" she wondered in her heart. Then she smiled and said, "It's OK then. You don't have to chop off your arm. It would be fair if you just tie up one arm and fight Big Brother using only the other one."

The Old Urchin laughed a big laugh. He thought that this way of fighting would be fun. Besides, he thought that he wouldn't necessarily lose even if he is using a single arm. So he placed his right hand in his belt prepared to fight. He said, "Come now! This way you will not regret it even if you lose."

When Zhou Botong and Guo Xiang were having their debate, Yang Guo didn't say anything. He was never afraid others would mock him because of his disability. On the contrary, he was proud because with only one arm he could beat anybody. Therefore, he was slightly miffed when he saw Zhou Botong do this because he felt he was looking down on him. "Old Urchin!" he said, "By doing that you are looking down on me. Aren't you thinking that a one-armed Yang Guo couldn't beat you? Huh! If I lose, I would immediately ..." Lashing his anger out, he was going to say that he would immediately kill himself right then and there. But suddenly he remembered his upcoming rendezvous with Xiao Longnu. He stopped before finishing his sentence.

Guo Xiang regretted her words. She was childishly thinking that she was doing Yang Guo some good. She did not remember that Yang Guo was a Chivalrous Hero (Da Xia), therefore, he would not

want anybody to look down on him. Quickly she approached Yang Guo and said, "Big Brother, my mistake ..." and then she came to the old man and took his arm out of the belt. She said, "Old Urchin, with his single arm Big Brother will defeat you. If you don't believe me, go ahead and try."

Without waiting for his answer, Yang Guo leaped and chopped out a left palm. Zhou replied with a left fist and didn't use his right arm. He felt it was unfair to use both arms.

Twenty stances passed. Yang Guo was upset since even with one arm the Old Urchin was not easy to defeat. The 'yang'ness [from yin-yang: yin - soft, cold, yang - hard, hot] in Zhou's fist and palms gradually surfaced. This type of energy was opposite to Zhou Botong's 'yin' energy of the "Vacant Fist" technique. Yang Guo noticed the change and suddenly recognized the "Demon Subduing Fist" of the "Nine Yin Manual" in the tomb. Yang Guo shouted, "What's so special about the 'Demon Subduing Fist'? Use two hands and take my 'Melancholic Sad Palms [An Ran Xiao Hun Zhang]."

Zhou was shocked; one, Yang Guo actually knew what technique he was using and two, what in the world was 'An Ran Xiao Hun Zhang'? Zhou was knowledgeable in the martial arts from the various sects of the world but he had never heard of this martial art before. He looked at Yang Guo and saw him with his arm bent, his eyes seemingly far away. His legs seemed to float and his front was completely open - his form contradicted martial arts norms. Zhou went forward to test him out and threw a fist towards Yang Guo's stomach.

He was afraid that he would hurt his opponent so he only put thirty percent power in his fist. Just as his fist was about to make contact, Yang Guo's stomach and chest contracted and then extended outwards. Zhou leapt back in shock - skilled fighters contracting their bodies to avoid attacks was fairly normal but he has never seen someone use their chest and stomach to actually attack someone. He was utterly surprised and shouted, "Uh, what kind of technique was that?"

"This was An Ran Xiao Hun Zhang's thirteenth stance, 'Muscles Jumping with the Frightened Heart' [Xin Jing Rou Tiao]," came the answer.

"Huh? I've never...never heard of such technique before," he said.

"Of course you haven't," said Yang Guo, "I developed this 'An Ran Xiao Hun Zhang' myself. This technique has seventeen stances."

As we remember, after being separated from Xiao Longnu at the 'Broken Heart Cliff', with the eagle's encouragement, he trained against the tide's waves. Apart from gradually strengthening his internal energy, he practiced no new martial arts. He couldn't forget his wife and as time passed, he was more and more depressed from loneliness. One day while walking by the sea, out of boredom he started to throw a few fists and kicks about. By now, his internal energy was at a very high level - anything he threw out contained great power. One of his light palms landed on a turtle's back and smashed its shell. From then on, he developed a complete set of palm techniques that were completely different from conventional martial arts. The palms relied on internal energy and not on complicated fist techniques.

Yang Guo had learned various first class martial arts from several experts since his childhood. From the Quanzhen, he learned the purest nei-gong techniques. From Xiao Longnu, he learned the "Jade Maiden Sword and Palm" techniques. From the manual inscribed on the Ancient Tomb's walls, he learned the "Nine Yin Manual". From his adopted father, Ouyang Feng, he inherited the 'Toad Stance' and the 'Reversing Blood Flow' techniques. From Hong Qigong he got the 'Dog Beating Stick', from Huang Yaoshi he received the "Divine Flicking Finger" and "Jade Flute Swordplay". Except for the "Solitary Yang Finger" from the Southern Emperor, it could be said that he had mastered the specialty of the Eastern Heretic, Western Poison, Northern Beggar and the Central Divinity. By analyzing and combining these various techniques, it was not too difficult for him to create a brand new fist technique.

Because he had one arm, he did not try to achieve victory with variations in stances but instead he deliberately chose to go against martial arts norms. Also, the names of this palm technique came from a line in one of Jiang Yan's works (a poet of the Southern Dynasties). This was the first time that the palms have met such a strong opponent as Zhou Botong.

Zhou Botong became even more excited when he heard this was a palm that Yang Guo had invented himself and said, "Good! I want to see this brand new technique." He continued to fight – with one hand. Yang Guo faced the sky as if he didn't even notice that Zhou was there and arched a palm towards his face and then downwards. The palm's power dispersed all around.

Zhou knew that there was no way to avoid the palm's power and sent out his palm to meet it. The palms collided and Zhou wobbled; he felt his chest tighten – his martial arts were not weaker than his opponent's but palm for palm, he could not compete with Yang Guo's heavy and overbearing palm. "Good!" he praised, "What was that stance?"

"It was 'Causing One to Worry' or 'Overbearing Sadness' [Gei Ren Yau Tien]." Yang Guo called out, "Watch out! The next stance is 'Out of Nothing Came Something' [Wu Zhong Sheng You]."

The Old Urchin laughed heartily, "Interesting! Very interesting!" he shouted, "Kid, how did you come up with those weird names?"

Yang Guo hung his arm down in a completely unprepared form. As soon as Zhou's fist came near him, Yang Guo suddenly moved everything; his left palm, right sleeve, kicks, head, butt, even his chest, back, stomach and waist attacked – they all contained a level of energy capable of injuring an opponent.

Zhou could never predict a move such as this. In a flash, over ten different stances came at him at once. 'Out of Nothing' was one stance but it contained tens of variations within. Even someone with martial arts as high as Zhou's, he was forced to step back. In this situation, he couldn't help but also use his right arm to fend off the attack. He had to use all his efforts to block this attack,

counterattacking never came into the equation. Nevertheless, he managed to block all the attacks and quickly leapt back in case of some more weird moves.

“Old Master Zhou!” cried Guo Xiang, “Two arms are not enough! You need three!” The old man laughed heartily and repeatedly nodded his head as a very high compliment to Yang Guo.

Yang Guo was impressed that Zhou was able to block all these profound sudden attacks and called out the next stance, “Watch this next stance: ‘Dragging Mud with Water’ [Tuo Ni Dai Shui].”

Both the old man and the young girl cheered, “Very nice! That sounds very nice!” he shouted.

“Don’t you praise me just yet. Take this one!” Yang Guo countered. His right sleeve flowed like water and his left palm slid out heavily like flowing mud and sand.

Zhou recalled something that his apprentice brother Wong Zhongyang told him about Huang Yaoshi. Huang Yaoshi had a palm technique he invented called the ‘Palms of the Five Elements’, the five elements were contained within the palms. Right now, Yang Guo’s right sleeve was like North’s water and his left palm was like Central’s earth, light and swift along with heavy and fierce. Zhou did not dare delay and immediately used the ‘Vacant Fist’ with his left hand and the ‘Demon Subduing Fist’ with his right; light against light, heavy against heavy. After the two attacks came together, they both shouted and moved back a couple of steps.

After those four stances, they both had great respect for each other. Yang Guo stood and stared blankly for a moment. He understood that Zhou was the strongest opponent his palms had ever met and if there was going to be a victor; an internal energy competition would be needed. If they did that, there was a possibility that one or maybe both of them would be heavily injured or even die – something he was not prepared to do after what happened to Hong Qigong and Ouyang Feng. Why would he do something like that to such a benevolent man as Zhou

Botong? He swallowed his pride and bowed to him saying, "Senior Zhou, I admit defeat." He then turned to Guo Xiang and said, "Little Sister, we failed to invite Senior Zhou. Let us leave!"

"Hold it! Hold it!" shouted the old man. "Didn't you say the 'An Ran Xiao Hun Zhang' has seventeen stances? You've just used four of them, what about the other thirteen?"

"There is no enmity between us," said Yang Guo. "Why should we fight to death? Junior admits defeat."

Zhou Botong shook his head, "Not right! Not right!" he said, "You have not lost yet, and I haven't won. Don't ever think of leaving this valley before you show me all the palms."

Yang Guo chuckled, "Senior, you act strange. I was trying to invite you to come with us, and now that I failed, I just want to leave. Why would you hold me here?"

Zhou Botong – who was crazy about martial arts, was baffled. "Good Brother," he begged, "How could I guess the thirteen stances of the 'An Ran Xiao Hun Zhang'? I hope you'll have pity on this old man. Please show me, I am willing to trade with any skill of your fancy."

An idea clicked on Yang Guo's head. "It's not difficult to learn my technique," he said, "I don't want anything in return; as long as you come with us to see Yinggu."

The old man wrinkled his eyebrows and said, "I won't see her even if you chop off my head."

"In that case, let me bid you farewell," said Yang Guo, turning his body around.

Suddenly Zhou leaped to block Yang Guo's path and threw out a fist. "Good Brother, please show me just one more stance," he begged. Yang Guo defended using Quanzhen martial arts. Zhou changed his fist techniques but Yang Guo kept to using Quanzhen palm techniques and Nine Yin martial arts to defend.

The 'Nine Yin Manual' contained all kinds of martial arts techniques; therefore, it was more than enough for Yang Guo to defend himself. If Yang Guo wanted to defeat Zhou Botong, it would be no easy task; but now that he's just concentrating on defending, Zhou was not able to do anything to him. No matter what kind of ruses or tricks that Zhou tried, Yang Guo did not fall for any of them. He did not use any new stances of his "Melancholic Sad Palms" but he repeated the four stances of his 'Melancholic Sad Palms' that he had previously used with different variations to agitate Zhou Botong even more.

The two fought for almost an hour. Zhou Botong was an old man, his vigor had been depleted and his internal energy was no longer the same as it was at the start of the fight. He knew now it would be difficult to get Yang Guo to use a new palm from his 'An Ren Xiao Hun Zhang' so he leapt back and begged Yang Guo, "All right! All right! I will kowtow eight times and take you as my master. Master Yang, disciple Zhou Botong kowtows to you!" And he really kowtowed to Yang Guo!

Yang Guo chuckled again, "How could I be your master? Nevertheless, it's suitable for me to tell you the names of the rest of the stances."

"Good! Aw ...! You are so nice," said the old man, ecstatic.

"Big Brother, don't tell him unless he is willing to come with us," said Guo Xiang.

Yang Guo smiled, "It's OK. He will only hear the names."

"Right! What's the problem if I only hear the names?" said the old man hastily.

Yang Guo went over to a big tree and sat underneath it. "Brother Zhou, hear this: the other stances are 'Wandering The Valley Of Emptiness' [Pai Huai Kong Gu], 'Strong Desire Weak Strength' [Li Bu Cong Xin] 'Good For Nothing' [Xing Shi Zou Rou] 'Disturbing Oneself - Confused Fool' [Yong Ren Zi Rao] 'Walking Upside Down - Perverse Action' [Dao Xing Ni Shi]..."

Listening to this Guo Xiang was howling with laughter while rolling around holding her stomach; but Zhou Botong listened attentively. Yang Guo paused and smiled seeing Guo Xiang's behavior, then continued, "'Restless Thought' [Fei Qin Wang Shi], 'A Lone Form Is A Mere Shadow' [Gu Xing Zhi Ying] 'Drink To Swallow One's Hatred – Cherishes Hatred Suppresses Sobs' [Yin Hen Tun Sheng] 'Six Disturbed Spirits/Ghosts' [Liu Shen Bu An] 'Entering A Dead End' [Qiong Tu Mo Lu], 'Face Without Feeling' [Mian Wu Ren Se], 'Longing For Emptiness' [Xiang Ru Fei Fei], 'Stupid As A Wooden Chicken [Dai Ru Mu Ji]."

The old man only scratched his head and grinned. After acting bewildered for a while he finally said, "Strange ...! Wonderful ...! Take "Face Without Feeling" for instance, how would you use that to defeat an enemy?"

"That stance contains not only one but numerous variations," explained Yang Guo. "Somebody who uses the stance has to be able to change his countenance, from upset to happy. The opponent will be affected by that change. We look sad, he would be sad, we look happy, he would follow. This one stance can defeat the enemy by manipulating their emotions."

"Is that stance based on the "Soul Altering Spell" from the 'Nine Yin Manual'?" asked Zhou Botong.

"That's right," answered Yang Guo.

"What about 'Walking Upside Down'?" asked the Old Urchin.

Yang Guo immediately turned upside down and threw a punch. "This is one of the thirty seven variations of the stance."

Zhou Botong nodded his head. "I know," he said, "This is from Ouyang Feng."

"Right again," Yang Guo leaped back up, "but in my stance there are 'bends among the straights', the 'bends' and 'straights' work together."

"What does it mean?" asked the old man.

“That is a secret, I can’t tell you.”

The old man opened his mouth, but then closed it again without saying anything. He knew, begging wouldn’t do him any good. He scratched his head and looked so disappointed.

Seeing him like that, Guo Xiang’s heart melted. She approached him and softly said, “Senior Zhou, why don’t you want to see Yinggu? I bet Big Brother would be willing to teach you his skill.”

Zhou Botong sadly sighed. “About Yinggu, it was due to my own foolishness when I was young,” he said. “It is an embarrassing story.”

“Why would you be embarrassed?” asked the young miss. “If you have something in your heart, better to talk it out than keep it to yourself. Every time I’ve done something wrong, I always admit it to my parents. True, they would scold me, but then that would it. If I lied, even though I did not get any scolding, I felt depressed. This time I disobeyed them by coming here without their permission. My mother will scold me for sure, but I will tell her the truth.”

This young girl’s honest words touched the old man’s heart. He glanced at Yang Guo and softly said, “Very well, I will tell you what I did. Only please do not laugh in my face!”

“Who would mock you?” said Guo Xiang. She held the old man’s arm, leaned on him and continued, “You can always tell the story like it happened to other people, or you could pretend it was an ancient lore. Afterward, I will also tell you my mischief.”

Zhou Botong looked at her innocent face, smiled and asked, “You have done mischief?”

“You think I can’t be naughty?” Guo Xiang countered.

“Well then,” Zhou Botong said, “Let me hear what you did first.”

“I have done much mischief. Let’s see ... a soldier was on guard duty one night on the city wall; and he fell asleep. Father had him arrested and was going to have him beheaded the next

morning. I saw him and my heart melted. I quietly let him go around midnight, and told him to run away as fast as he can. Father was furious. He found out it was my doing and he beat me up. Another time I saw a poor peasant girl looking longingly at my mother's golden bracelet. I stole it and gave it to that poor girl. Afterward Mother looked for it everywhere but could not find it. I laughed secretly, but did not say anything. Finally I told her the truth. She was not mad at me, but my elder sister insisted that I get the bracelet back from the girl."

Zhou Botong sighed heavily, "What you did is incomparable to what I've done." Then, with embarrassment in his voice, he told how in his youth he tagged along his martial brother Wang Chongyang visiting the Emperor Duan. He told them how Concubine Liu had learned martial arts from him; how he secretly made love to her; how the Concubine had always wanted to see him but he kept avoiding her, and how - because of anger the Emperor abdicated his throne and became a monk.

Guo Xiang and Yang Guo listened attentively. After the old man finished, timidly she asked, "Besides Concubine Liu, did the Emperor have any other wives or concubines?"

"Even though he was incomparable to the Song Emperor, he had three palaces, six courtyards and dozens of other women: his queen and other concubines," he answered.

"There! You see?" said the girl, "Emperor Duan had many other women, but you, you didn't have a single woman. Therefore, as a friend, he could give Concubine Liu to you."

Yang Guo nodded his head and thought, "This girl does not adhere strictly to common etiquette and tradition. Truly she is a girl after my own heart."

"At that time Emperor Duan said the same thing," the old man said. "But I know that he loved Concubine Liu very much. Because of this scandal he became a monk. This proves how deeply I have offended him."

Listening to this, Yang Guo intervened, "Reverend Yideng became a monk because he thought he sinned against you and not because you sinned against him. Don't you know that?"

"What did he do?" Zhou Botong wondered.

"Well, there was a man who injured your son and he refused to help him," Yang Guo answered.

For all these long years Zhou Botong had never known that Yinggu bore him a son. "My ... my son?" he stammered.

"I don't know the details," answered Yang Guo, "I heard this from Reverend Yideng." He immediately narrated what he heard at the Black Dragon Marsh.

Zhou Botong was spellbound. He stood silently, recalling how Yinggu had suffered for many-many years. A feeling of love, compassion and guilt slowly crept into his heart.

Yang Guo noticed this old man's behavior; he said in his heart, "This Senior is a compassionate man. His character is almost the same as mine. For a man like this, how could I withhold the seventeen stances of 'An Ren Xiao Hun Zhang'?" Having had this thought he then said, "Senior Zhou, let me show you the entire 'An Ren Xiao Hun Zhang'. I beg you to give me some pointers." And then he demonstrated all the stances of 'An Ren Xiao Hun Zhang' except the 'Face Without Feeling', because he was wearing a mask. As a highly skilled martial artist - plus a profound knowledge of the "Nine Yin Manual", Zhou Botong was immediately able to understand the stances. The only two he had some difficulty with were "Dead Man Walking" and "Entering a Dead End". Yang Guo explained several times, but he still could not grasp the essence of the stances. "Senior Zhou," Yang Guo finally said, "I was separated from my wife fifteen years ago. Day and night I kept thinking about her. In agony I created these two stances. Senior is a carefree man; you have never known suffering in your life. No wonder you cannot grasp the essence of the stances."

"Ah! How did you get separated from your wife?" the old man was surprised. "She was beautiful and kind hearted. No wonder you cannot forget her."

Yang Guo did not want to mention Guo Fu, so he told him how his wife was gravely injured, and was taken by the 'Divine Nun of the South Sea' as her disciple, and how he had to wait for sixteen years before they could see each other again. He also mentioned how he prayed everyday for his wife's safety. Finally he said, "I just want to see her one more time. Afterward, I don't care if I will have to die. I will die a satisfied man."

Listening to Yang Guo, Guo Xiang was saddened and tears flowed down her cheeks. "Oh God, let them see each other again," she said with a trembling voice.

Since his separation from his wife, this was the first time somebody had prayed for him earnestly. He was so touched and vowed not to forget her kindness. He heaved a sigh and bowed to Zhou Botong. "Senior Zhou, I bid you farewell." He took Guo Xiang's hand and left.

After only a few steps Guo Xiang looked back and said, "Senior Zhou, did you see that? Big Brother is thinking about his wife all the time. Yinggu is the same. She is thinking about you. Do you have the heart not to see her?"

Zhou Botong was startled and his countenance paled.

"Little Sister, let it go," Yang Guo whispered. "Everybody has their own thoughts; we have no right to tell him what to do." Slowly they left the "Hundred Flower Valley". Their hearts were heavy.

"Big Brother," Guo Xiang asked, "Are you going to be sad if I ask you about your wife?"

"No," he answered, "We are going to see each other in a few months."

"How did you meet her?" asked Guo Xiang.

Yang Guo then told her his life story. How as an orphan he was bullied by the Quanzhen priests, how he ran away to the Ancient Tomb and met Xiao Longnu, and how after several years of living together they fell in love with each other, and finally how they got separated at the 'Broken Heart Cliff'.

Guo Xiang was listening with a sad heart. After Yang Guo finished his story, she said earnestly, "I pray to Heaven that you will meet her safely."

"Thank you, thank you very much!" Yang Guo said. "I will not forget your prayer. I will let my wife know about your loving kindness toward us."

"Every year, right on my birthday, Mother will pray to Heaven for our safety," Guo Xiang continued. "That day she always tells me to make three wishes. Oftentimes I could not figure out what to wish even after thinking about it for half a day. But this year, I already know what to wish. I will wish that Big Brother will meet your lovely wife much earlier."

"And the other two wishes?" asked Yang Guo.

Guo Xiang laughed, "That's a secret. I cannot tell you."

A moment later they heard somebody calling behind them, "Brother Yang, wait! Brother Yang, wait for me!" It was Zhou Botong.

Yang Guo was overjoyed! Quickly he turned his head and saw the old man coming to them with blinding speed. "Brother Yang!" he shouted, "I carefully thought it out. Take me to see Yinggu."

"Now, that is the proper thing to do," Guo Xiang was so touched. "You don't have any idea how great her suffering was."

"After you left, I kept thinking about what Brother Yang said," explained the old man. "I won't be able to sleep for the rest of my life unless I see her. I have an important question I'd like to ask her."

Zhou Botong wanted to continue the journey overnight if it were up to him. But Guo Xiang was too tired, so he reluctantly agreed to stop and rest underneath a big tree. Very early the next morning they started walking again. They arrived at the Black Dragon Marsh before noon.

Seeing that Yang Guo was successful in bringing Zhou Botong along, Yideng and Yinggu's delight was indescribable. From afar Zhou Botong had already shouted his question, "Yinggu, how many cowlicks were there on our son's head?"

Yinggu was surprised. Not in her wildest dream did she think that Zhou's first question would be a seemingly meaningless one like that. But she answered anyway, "Two."

"Aha! Same as me!" cried the old man. "That kid must be very smart." He paused a moment and then regretfully said, "Too bad he died!"

Yinggu was happy and sad at the same time, she sobbed uncontrollably. The old man playfully punched her on the waist and said, "There, don't cry, don't cry ..." He turned his head toward Yideng and said, "Emperor Duan, I seduced your wife, and you did not help my child. It's a draw. Nobody owes anybody anything. Let us forget the past."

"This is the man who injured your son," Yideng said, pointing toward Ci'en. "You can kill him."

"Yinggu, go ahead!" said Zhou Botong.

The old granny looked at Ci'en intently and then softly said, "If not for him, I might not have seen you for the rest of my life. Besides, we cannot raise the dead. With the joy I experience today, I am willing to forgive and forget what had happened!"

"Right ... that's right," said Zhou Botong. "Very well, let us forgive him."

In his half conscious state, Ci'en was still able to comprehend what was happening around him. He was so relieved. He turned

his eyes toward Yideng and weakly said, "Thank you Shifu for perfecting me." Then to Yang Guo he said, "Thank you benevolent master for toiling on my behalf." Upon saying that he closed his eyes and gave up his ghost, smiling.

Reverend Yideng immediately said a prayer and bowed, "Ci'en ... Ci'en ..." he said hoarsely. "Officially we are master and disciple, but in reality you are my friend. For many, many years we have lived together and you always wanted to redeem your sins. Today you go to that eternal place. My heart is saddened, but I am happy." Then with Yang Guo and Guo Xiang's help he dug the earth and buried the monk.

Yang Guo stood in front of the grave, staring blankly. He recalled the time when they were a newly wed couple, how Xiao Longnu and he met Ci'en at the hut on the snow covered mountain, and how Ci'en was lashing out in his sickness. But now, one of the experts in the Jianghu world was laid beneath the earth. He could not help but feel very sad.

A moment later Yinggu took the two foxes from her robe. "Master Yang," she said, "I don't have anything to repay your kindness. Please take these two animals."

Yang Guo took one and said, "Thank you. I think one is enough."

Suddenly Yideng said, "Master Yang, you take both of them, but don't kill them. Just slit their knees. From each fox, alternately, take one small cup of blood everyday. After taking two cups, no matter how bad your friend's injury is, he will certainly recover."

Yinggu and Yang Guo were thrilled. "It will be great that we don't have to take their lives," Yang Guo said. And then he took both animals and bade Reverend Yideng, Zhou Botong and Yinggu goodbye.

"After you are done, just let them go," said the granny, "They'll know the way home."

Suddenly Zhou Botong said, "Emperor Duan, Yinggu, I invite you to take a rest for a few days in the Hundred-Flower Valley. Brother

Yang, after your friend is cured you and little sister have to stop by and we'll have a good time together."

"If everything goes as planned, I will certainly come and visit you three seniors," he answered, paid his respects and left.

The foxes' eyes were looking at Yinggu, they whimpered softly as though begging for mercy. Yinggu shouted, "Master Yang won't take your lives, what are you afraid of?" Guo Xiang stretched out her hand, put on a comforting smile, and stroked the foxes' heads.

End of Chapter 34.

Chapter 35 - The Three Golden Needles

Translated by Hugh (aka IcyFox)



Guo Xiang said, "I've never even seen your face, how can I claim that I know you? This is not a small matter." Yang Guo said, "Fine!" He reached up to his face and tore the mask off. Guo Xiang saw a suave and handsome face, with sword-like eyebrows and bright and sparkling eyes, but he was slightly pale, and rather slender.

Yang Guo brought about the reunion of Zhou Botong and Yinggu, allowing Ci'en to die peacefully and managed to obtain the Nine-tailed Fox. Through his efforts he performed three good deeds in a row and was very happy and he went back to the Beastly Mountain Village with Guo Xiang and the Divine Eagle.

The Shi brothers saw Yang Guo carrying two foxes in his arm and were very happy and grateful, immediately slitting a fox's leg to draw its blood. Shi Shugang consumed the blood and exercised his internal energy to recuperate.

That night the Beastly Mountain Village threw a banquet and invited Yang Guo to be the guest-of-honour, serving him dozens of exotic dishes like bears' paws which outsiders could never have the chance to taste. They also took out a big plate and piled it up with delicious food for the Divine Eagle to eat. The Shi brothers and the Xishan Ghosts never mentioned their gratitude to Yang Guo as they had already promised themselves in their minds, that since Yang Guo spared their lives, should he have any problems they would gladly give up their lives to help him. During the banquet they talked loudly, discussing the latest news in Jianghu.

Ever since Guo Xiang met Yang Guo, she was extremely delighted, but now she did not utter a single word, silently listening to their conversations. Yang Guo occasionally glanced at her and saw that her face was troubled, but he assured himself that it was because they had just rushed

about continuously for the past few days, so it was natural that she was tired. He never expected Guo Xiang to be troubled over their impending departure after such a short meeting and hence was feeling depressed.

After drinking a few bowls of wine an ape outside suddenly screeched loudly, and caused many other apes to shriek as well. The Shi brothers' faces became rather grave. Shi Mengjie said, "Brother Yang, Xishan guests, please remain seated, I'll go check it out." He then hurriedly ran outside.

They all knew a strong foe must have come to their forest, but seeing the many martial experts gathered here, they need not be afraid even if the foe is very highly skilled. The Fairy Ghost said, "It'd be best if it's that Prince Hou Du that's here, we can all fight him together to help Third Brother Shi get back at him."

Before he finished saying, they heard Shi Mengjie say, "Who is this visiting our village in the middle of the night? Please stop there." Then a female voice was heard, saying "Is there a big-headed shortie around here? I want to ask him where on Earth he has taken my sister."

When Guo Xiang heard it was her sister who was here, she was shocked and happy; but when she saw Yang Guo's penetrating gaze and strange expression, she felt strange and swallowed back the "Sister!" she wanted to call out.

Then they heard Shi Mengjie angrily say, "You are a rude woman, why are you not answering my question and instead causing a commotion here?"

Guo Fu shouted, "Out of my way!" There then came the clash of weapons as the two began to fight with Guo Fu trying to force her way in and Shi Mengjie trying to keep her out. Yang Guo had last seen Guo Fu at the Passionless Valley (Jue Qing Gu) more than 10 years ago; now, as he heard her again, he

felt a hundred emotions surge through him. Then the clashing sounds of weapons got further and further away as Shi Mengjie managed to draw her away.

The Big Head Ghost said, "She's heading in my direction. I'll go meet her." He then dashed out of the hall, followed by Shi Jiqiang and Feng Yiweng.

Guo Xiang stood up and said, "Big Brother, my sister is here to find me, I've got to go."

Yang Guo was shocked and said, "That... that is your sister?"

Guo Xiang said, "Yeah. I wanted to meet the Eagle Hero, so that big headed Uncle brought me here. I... am very happy..." She did not finish saying this and lowered her head and quickly stepped outside.

Yang Guo saw a tear drop fall into the wine cup and thought, "So she was the baby, she has grown so big now. She came to find me in the middle of the night, she must have a problem, but why doesn't she mention it? She looks kind of troubled, I must not ignore it." He swiftly moved out of the hall and chased her. She was about to enter the forest so he strode several large steps and caught up with her, saying, "Little Sister, if you have any problems, just say it."

Guo Xiang smiled, "No, nothing. I'm OK." The pale moonlight was shining on her fair and refined face and Yang Guo saw clearly the tear drops in her eyes, so he soothingly said, "So you are Hero Guo and Madam Guo's youngest daughter. Did your sister bully you?" He thought since Guo Jing and Huang Rong were very capable and their name was well-known throughout the Central Plains, they should have no difficulty solving her problems. Most probably it was Guo Fu being overbearing, obnoxious and bullying her little sister.

Guo Xiang laughed, "Even if my sister bullies me, I'm not afraid of her. If she scolds me, I argue with her, and anyway she wouldn't dare lay her hands on me."

Yang Guo said, "Then why did you come to find me? Tell me."

Guo Xiang said, "At Fenglingdu I heard the people talk of your heroic deeds. I was full of admiration and wanted to meet you; I've got no other intentions. Tonight during the banquet I remembered the phrase 'tian xia mei bu san de yan xi' (there's no meeting without a parting) and my heart became heavy. Who knew that before the banquet is over I... already have to go." Her voice was now cracking.

Yang Guo's heart quivered, remembering that on the very day she was born he carried her and fought fiercely with the Golden-Wheel Monk (Jinlun Fawang) and Li Mochou. Then he remembered how he and Li Mochou caught the leopard to feed her with milk. Then he took her into the Ancient Tomb and took care of her for a while. He never expected that when he met her again, she would already be a graceful young lady. As he reminisced about the past, he could not help but feel strongly about the matter.

After a while, Guo Xiang said, "Big Brother, I have to go now! I need to trouble you for a favour."

Yang Guo said, "Just say it."

Guo Xiang said, "When will you and your wife be reunited?"

Yang Guo said, "The start of winter this year."

Guo Xiang said, "When you meet her, please send a message to Xiangyang and let me share your joy."

Yang Guo was very grateful and thought that, although this lady and Guo Fu have the same mother, their characters were worlds apart. He asked, "How are your parents?"

Guo Xiang replied, "They're fine." She suddenly thought of a wish and said, "Big Brother, when you meet your wife, please come to Xiangyang and visit me, OK? My parents and you are the heroes of the times; they will surely want to see you."

Yang Guo said, "When the time comes we shall see. Little Sister, about our meeting – please do not mention it to your sister... hmm... don't mention it to your parents either."

Guo Xiang was curious and asked, "Why?" Then she remembered that when the people were talking about the Eagle Hero at Fenglingdu her sister slighted him, so perhaps they may have some grudges, so she said, "OK I won't say anything." Guo Xiang smiled sweetly and said, "You treat me very well. Sister often tells people that she's Hero Guo and Madam Guo's daughter, I feel embarrassed for her. Although our parents are famous, we don't have to keep on saying it all the time. But if I say the Eagle Hero is my big brother, my sister can't imitate me."

Yang Guo smiled, "Why do you look up to me so highly?" He paused for a while then said, "You're sixteen years old this year. September... October... 22nd... 23rd... 24th... Your birthday is on the 24th of the tenth month, right?"

Guo Xiang was very surprised and exclaimed "Ah!" then said, "Yes, how did you know?"

Yang Guo did not answer and continued, "You were born in Xiangyang, so your given name is 'Xiang', right?"

Guo Xiang said, "So you know everything, yet you pretended not to know me. The day I was born you carried me, true?"

Yang Guo began day-dreaming and did not answer her, he lowered his head and mumbled, "16 years ago, on the 24th of the tenth month, we were fighting with Fawang (Golden-wheel Monk), and Long'er was holding that baby..."

Guo Xiang did not understand what he was talking about, but she heard the fight in the forest becoming more intense and feared her sister would injure Shi Mengjie, so she said, "Big Brother, I really have to go now."

Yang Guo was still mumbling, "On the 24th of the tenth month, time flies, it's almost 16 years already." Suddenly he woke up and said, "Ah... you're going... on the 24th of the tenth month this year you're going to burn joss-sticks to ask for three wishes." He remembered she said that when she asked for her wishes, she would pray for him and Xiao Longnu's reunion.

Guo Xiang said, "Big Brother, if in future I request three wishes from you, will you agree?"

Yang Guo said, "I will definitely try my best to fulfill your wishes." He took out a small box from his bosom and flipped open the lid. Then he took out three golden needles which Xiao Longnu used as projectiles and gave them to Guo Xiang, saying, "When I see these needles, it's like seeing you. If you can't meet me, get someone to send the needles here and I'll carry out your requests."

Guo Xiang said, "Thanks very much!" She took the needles and said, "I'll say my first wish now." She then returned a needle to Yang Guo and said, "I want you to take this mask off and let me see you with my own eyes."

Yang Guo laughed and said, "This is really too easy. It's just that I don't want my old acquaintances to recognize me so I put this mask on. You use one needle so casually, won't it be a waste?"

Guo Xiang said, "I've never even seen your face, how can I claim that I know you? This is not a small matter."

Yang Guo said, "Fine!" He reached up to his face and lifted the mask off.

Guo Xiang saw a suave and handsome face, with sword-like eyebrows and bright and sparkling eyes, but he was slightly pale and rather slender. Yang Guo saw her closely examining his face and smiled, "What?"

Guo Xiang felt her face go red. She softly said, "Nothing." But she was thinking, "I never knew you would be so good-looking."

Guo Xiang pulled herself together and returned another needle to Yang Guo, saying, "I'll tell you my second wish."

Yang Guo smiled, "Telling me a few years from now will make no difference, young lady, and you're having childish wishes." He did not stretch out his hand to receive the needle.

Guo Xiang stuck the needle in his shirt and said, "My second wish is that on the 24th of the tenth month, which is my birthday, I want you to come down to Xiangyang to have a chat with me."

This wish required more effort to complete, but was still rather childish. Yang Guo said, "I promise, it's not so difficult. But I will only meet you alone; I won't see your parents or your sister."

Guo Xiang smiled, "That's alright with me." Her smooth white hand clutched the third needle and waved it in the moonlight and said, "My third wish is..."

Yang Guo shook his head, thinking, "Do I, Yang Guo, grant wishes so easily? This young lady is naïve and treats this as a game."

He saw her face had turned red and she laughed, "I can't think of the third wish now. I'll tell you some other day." She then rushed into the forest calling, "Sister, sister!"

Guo Xiang ran towards the clashing sounds and she saw Guo Fu fighting fiercely with Shi Mengjie and the Big Head Ghost, while Feng Yiweng and Shi Jiqiang were watching the fight with their weapons at the ready. Guo Xiang shouted, "Sister, I'm here, and these are good friends."

Guo Fu's training had her parents' guidance in martial arts, while her husband, Yelu Qi, was a highly skilled expert. In the past few years her skills had improved greatly. But she was inattentive and impatient, so she did not train hard. Although her parents and husband were well-known experts, her wugong was only slightly above average. She found it difficult with the two's continuous onslaught and was becoming listless. Then suddenly she heard her sister calling out, so she shouted, "Sister, come here."

Shi Mengjie heard Guo Xiang call Yang Guo "Big Brother", and now Guo Fu called her "sister", he was surprised and thought, "Can it be that this woman is the Eagle Hero's wife or sister?" He had just sent out a blow that he quickly withdrew and leapt backwards.

Guo Fu clearly knew her opponent had given way to her, but she was angry and she thrust her sword forward fiercely and slashed Shi Mengjie's chest. The Big Head Ghost was shocked and shouted, "Hey, what..." Guo Fu made turned the sword with a bright flash and the Big Head Ghost's back suffered a long slit. She felt proud of herself and said, "Now you know my great prowess!"

Guo Xiang shouted, "Sister, I said these are friends!" Guo Fu angrily said, "Quickly follow me back! Who could be friends with these scoundrels?" Shi Mengjie's chest injury was not

light. He staggered a few steps backwards and collapsed onto the ground.

Guo Xiang hurried forward and bent down to raise him up, asking, "Uncle Shi, how are you?" Shi Mengjie's chest was bleeding profusely, staining her dress. Guo Xiang quickly tore off a strip of cloth from her dress and dressed his wound.

Guo Fu held her sword and stood aside, nagging, "Hurry up, let's go! I'll go back and tell Father and Mother and we'll see if they beat you!"

Guo Xiang angrily said, "You rashly injured people. I'll tell Father and Mother as well!" Shi Mengjie saw her face turning red with fury and tears forming in her eyes so he said, "Lady, please don't worry. I won't die from it." Shi Jiqiang held the horn to his mouth and breathed heavily, but he could not decide if he should fight all out with Guo Fu or attend to his brother's injuries.

Suddenly Guo Fu screamed "Ah!" Two fierce tigers appeared out of the blue silently, then, as she turned away to evade them, she saw two lions squatting in front of her, and four leopards waiting by the side. It was Shi Zhongmeng who had led the animals here and surrounded her. Guo Fu became white as sheet and almost fainted.

Then from within the forest someone shouted, "Fifth brother, how are your wounds?" Shi Mengjie said, "I'm still fine." Then that person said, "The Eagle Hero has instructed us to allow these two ladies to leave." Shi Jiqiang made a few whistles and the animals turned around and disappeared into the darkness.

Guo Xiang said, "Uncle Shi, I apologize on behalf of my sister."

Shi Mengjie's wound was hurting badly, so he laughed bitterly and said, "Because of the Eagle Hero's intervention, even if your sister killed me it would be nothing."

Guo Xiang anxiously asked, "Your injuries... are really not serious?"

Guo Fu grabbed her hand and said, "Are you still not coming?" She pulled her hard and dragged her out of the forest.

When the Shi brothers and Xishan Ghosts saw the sisters leave they all came out together to check Shi Mengjie and the Big Head Ghost's injuries. They started talking and all said Guo Fu was in the wrong. But they did not know what her relationship was with the Eagle Hero, so they did not dare be rude to her. Shi Jiqiang furiously said, "That young lady is such a nice girl, but her sister is so overbearing. Fifth brother clearly gave way to her and she knew it, yet she did such a despicable thing. If the sword had pierced two inches deeper, how could he survive?" The Big Head Ghost said, "Let's ask the Eagle Hero about this woman. At Fenglingdu she kept defaming the Eagle Hero, so I guess he wouldn't protect her."

Someone stepped out from behind a big tree, saying, "Thank God Brother Shi's injuries are not serious. That woman has always been rash. My right arm was actually cut off by her." That person was Yang Guo. When they heard this, they felt very angry and could only stare at him wordlessly. They all wanted to know more, but dare not ask.

Guo Fu dragged her sister all the way to Fenglingdu. By that time the ice on the Huang He (Yellow River) had already melted, so they crossed the river and headed back to Xiangyang. All along the way Guo Fu nagged like an old woman, continuously chiding Guo Xiang, telling her not to mix with such uncouth people. Guo Xiang pretended to be

deaf and largely ignored her, but she could not stop talking about the Eagle Hero.

When they reached Xiangyang, Guo Fu handed over the 'Everlasting Spring Priest', Qiu Chuji's letter to her parents. The letter said that he was old and sick in bed, so he has sent the Quanzhen Sect's new leader Li Zhichang together with the top Quanzhen disciples to help. After this was done, the first thing Guo Fu said was, "Father, Mother, sister was disobedient along the way and caused a lot of trouble." Guo Jing was shocked and asked about the matter. Guo Fu then told of how, at Fenglingdu, Guo Xiang followed someone they did not know and went missing for two days and nights, exaggerating the events as she went along.

At that time Guo Jing was handling some urgent military matters and was quite worried about the situation, so when he heard what Guo Fu said, he got very angry and asked, "Xiang'er, your sister is right, isn't she?"

Guo Xiang laughed happily, saying, "Sister is making a mountain out of a molehill; I went with a friend to see what's going on, what's the big fuss about that!"

Guo Jing frowned and said, "What friend? What's the name?"

Guo Xiang stuck out her tongue and said, "Ah, I never asked his name, but his nickname is 'Big Head Ghost'."

Guo Fu said, "He's one of the so called Xishan Ghosts."

Guo Jing had heard of the Xishan Ghosts, and although they did not commit any evil acts, they were not gentlemen either. When he heard of his daughter's mixing with such people, he got even angrier. But he remained silent, only making a "Hey" sound and saying no more. Huang Rong however rebuked Guo Xiang sternly.

That night Guo Jing organized a family feast and arranged the seating plan for Guo Fu and Guo Polu, but left Guo Xiang out. Yelu Qi tried to persuade his father and mother-in-law otherwise. Guo Jing said, "If that girl is not firmly taken in hand, it will only harm her. Xiang'er has been strange since she was small, causing me to worry about her. Since you're her brother-in-law, you should worry for her too." Yelu Qi did not dare say more.

The Guo couple had spoiled Guo Fu too much, thus allowing her to create so much trouble. So now they were stricter with Guo Xiang and Guo Polu. Guo Polu was quiet and serious, just like his father, but Guo Xiang usually agreed on the outside, yet she was usually dissatisfied on the inside. That night she heard the maid say that Master and Mistress organized a family feast but intentionally did not invite her. Guo Xiang got angry and went on hunger strike and starved for two whole days. On the third day, Huang Rong's heart softened and without informing Guo Jing she personally cooked several dishes and cajoled her daughter, finally making her smile. Huang Rong's cooking skills were the best in the world; even though she had not cooked for a long time she was still able to cook delicious food for Guo Xiang. But in doing so all the effort to discipline her had gone right down the drain.

The Mongols had conquered Dali and sent the troops north; another division headed south, planning on meeting at Xiangyang. They aimed to destroy the Song Dynasty in one fell swoop. The Mongols had been planning this campaign for many years, and the north division was led by the Great Khan's brother Khubilai. The south division was led by the Great Khan Mengke himself, together with all their valiant and capable generals. The large number of troops involved was unprecedented in Mongol history. The troops looked grand and unyielding, showing the Mongols' might.

Before the Mongols arrived, Xiangyang was already in a state of shock. However, the useless Song Premier Ding Daquan was a traitor and dismissed this matter totally. Xiangyang dispatched numerous urgent messages, but the traitorous premier just said, "The Mongolians have been attacking Xiangyang for many decades and have never succeeded; they just may go back empty-handed this time as well. This is just a small matter; why should we bother ourselves with it?"

When the Mongols' south division conquered Dali, Guo Jing immediately knew the urgency of this matter and sent letters to all the heroes in Jianghu, inviting them to meet at Xiangyang to assist with the defense. The Mongol troops were swift and deadly and were able to conquer Dali in just a short time. The King of Dali, the great-grandson of Yideng, was young and ignorant and he had only ruled for two years when Dali was conquered. He was rescued in the final hour by Zhu Ziliu, Wu Santong and the Fisherman.

The Mongolian troops were steadily advancing closer and closer. The Heroes' Summit was scheduled for the 15th of the tenth month and was to last 10 days. Today was the 13th, two days away from the meet, and all the heroes from all over Jianghu had gathered at Xiangyang. Guo Jing and Huang Rong were concentrating on military affairs and gave the responsibility of welcoming the guests to Lu Youjiao and Yelu Qi, with the Wu brothers and their wives Yelu Yan and Wanyan Ping to assist them.

On this day Zhu Ziliu, the Fisherman, Wu Santong, Quanzhen Sect's leader Li Zhichang and his fellow sect disciples, the Beggar Clan elders with the seventh and eighth grade members, Lu Guanying and Cheng Yaojia had all arrived... Xiangyang was now filled with many well known martial experts. Many old heroes who rarely appeared in Jianghu were also present. This time the Heroes' Summit may decide the fate of Xiangyang. They also respected the Guo couple,

so all of them rushed to Xiangyang upon receiving the invitation. This Meet was grander than the one at Dasheng many years ago.

That night, Guo Jing had a private banquet with his old friends, inviting more than 10 people to dine with him, including Zhu Ziliu and Wu Santong. They drank past the third watch but the Beggar Clan Chief still did not turn up. They thought he must have been busy with the Beggar Clan affairs and so did not find anything amiss. They ate and drank, discussing Jianghu events of the past 10 years. Yelu Qi, Guo Fu and the Wu brothers group had a table to themselves and they chatted animatedly.

Suddenly an eighth grade member of the Beggar Clan burst in and whispered something to Huang Rong. Huang Rong's face became grave and she stood up, saying loudly, "What?" The people were shocked and all turned to stare at her. Huang Rong said, "There are no outsiders here. Just say it. How did this happen?" They saw tears well up in her eyes as she spoke, so it must be something terrible. Then the beggar said, "This afternoon Clan Leader Lu took two seventh grade sect members to patrol outside the city but they didn't return. I could not let the matter rest and went to investigate. We went to the Yang Tai Fu Temple down the hill and found Clan Leader Lu's corpse there..." The group gave a cry of "Ah!" when they heard this.

The beggar's voice cracked as he said this, he knew Lu Youjiao's martial arts were not excellent, but he was responsible and caring and had earned the respect of the beggars. The beggar continued, "The two seventh grade members are not dead yet. They said the three of them were ambushed by the Mongolian prince Hou Du who killed the Clan Leader. The two seventh grade members fought with him and were severely injured by his palms."

Guo Jing was so angered his face turned white and only said, "Hou Du!" He thought that if he had known this would happen, he would not have spared him at Chongyang Palace years ago.

Huang Rong said, "Did Hou Du leave any message?"

The beggar said, "I dare not say."

Huang Rong said, "Why not? He wants Guo Jing and Huang Rong to surrender to the Mongols, or they will end up like Lu Youjiao, right?"

The beggar said, "The Chief is brilliant. The scoundrel Hou Du said exactly that." According to tradition, Huang Rong was no longer the Beggar Clan leader, but the beggars all still addressed her as "Chief".

Huang Rong frowned and said, "Lu Youjiao's "Dog Beating Stick" has been taken by Hou Du, right?" The beggar said, "Yes."

The guests all left the banquet and went to see Lu Youjiao's body. They observed a steel fan's mark on Lu Youjiao's back and a rib bone was broken. This showed that Hou Du had snuck up and attacked with his fan from behind, then killed him with his palm. The people all felt deeply grieved when they saw this.

At that time thousands of beggars in Jianghu were gathered in Xiangyang. When they heard that Lu Youjiao had been killed, the city fell into a gloomy silence.

Guo Xiang was on good terms with Lu Youjiao, often pulling him out into the wilderness to drink wine and chat about Jianghu affairs. The two usually chatting for half a day, and were very friendly. The Yang Tai Fu Temple was not far from Xiangyang, so Guo Xiang and Lu Youjiao often went there. When she heard her dear old friend was killed there she was

greatly hurt and aggrieved, so she took a pot of wine and went to the temple like she usually did.

Late that night, Guo Xiang put down two cups and filled them with wine, saying, "Uncle Lu, half a month ago, when we were merrily chatting here, who knew such a hero would meet such a tragic end? Let me offer you a toast." She took up a cup and poured the wine onto the ground in a sweeping motion, remembering their past friendship. She felt overwhelmed by sadness and tears welled up in her eyes. She said, "Uncle Lu, rest peacefully." She held the other cup forward with both hands and then drank the wine.

Her tolerance for liquor was not very good, but she was open-minded and friendly with the heroes of Jianghu and often drank with them. When she drank two cups of wine she felt giddy and slightly hot.

In the darkness a shadow suddenly flashed past and she thought it must be Lu Youjiao's spirit who had come and said, "Is that Uncle Lu? Please come here." Although her heart was beating rapidly, she still wanted to meet Lu Youjiao's spirit. However a female voice was heard saying, "Why are you fooling around here in the middle of the night? Mother wants you to go back quickly." The person came into the temple in a flash – it was Guo Fu.

Guo Xiang was very disappointed and said, "I'm waiting here for Uncle Lu's spirit. Now you come barging in like this, how would he show up? Sister, you return first, I'll be following you shortly."

Guo Fu said, "Stop talking rubbish. You're just imagining things. Why would Lu Youjiao's spirit want to see you?"

Guo Xiang said, "He was very friendly with me, moreover I promised to share my private thoughts with him. I said I

would tell him on my birthday. Who knew he couldn't be here." She became depressed as she said this.

Guo Fu said, "Mother saw that you had disappeared and predicted you'd be here. You monkey, you're getting naughtier, but you can't escape from Mother's palm. Mother is angry with you for being so daring – who knows, that Hou Du might be lurking around here somewhere; won't that be dangerous?"

Guo Xiang sighed and said, "I was thinking about Uncle Lu and forgot about the danger. Good sister, please accompany me for a while, maybe Uncle Lu's spirit might still come and see me. But you shouldn't talk, lest you scare him away."

Guo Fu had never really respected Lu Youjiao and felt that he became the Beggar Clan Leader all due to her mother's grooming and recommendations. She thought that even if his spirit came, she would not be afraid. She also knew her sister's character – since she wanted to wait there, unless if their parents personally came to stop her, she would not budge no matter what Guo Fu said. So she sat down and sighed, "Sister, you're getting older, yet you are still so childish. You're sixteen this year; in two or three years you'll be getting married. Please don't tell me, that even when you move into your in-laws' place, you'll still act so crazily?"

Guo Xiang said, "What's the difference? After you married brother-in-law, you are still as carefree as a single woman."

Guo Fu said, "Hey! How can others compare to your brother-in-law? He's a hero of the times and is very broad-minded, he wouldn't restrict my movements. He's talented in martial arts and literature. Among the younger generation, who can compare to him? If your future husband is half as good as him, Father and Mother will be very satisfied."

Guo Xiang knew she was so boastful and said, "Brother-in-law is of course talented, but I don't believe there's none in this world who can compare to him." She felt proud of herself as she said that. Guo Xiang said, "I know someone who's ten times better than brother-in-law."

Guo Fu got angry, saying, "Who? Tell me."

Guo Xiang said, "Why must I say it? It's good enough for me to know."

Guo Fu laughed coldly, asking, "Is it Brother Zhu? Wang Jianming?" She named a few young heroes.

Guo Xiang kept shaking her head, saying, "They can't even compete with brother-in-law, how can they be ten times better?"

Guo Fu said, "Unless you're talking about Grandfather, Father, Mother, and Uncle Zhu, they are older heroes."

Guo Xiang said, "No! The person I mentioned is younger than brother-in-law, and he's more handsome and his martial arts are very much better. The difference is as great as night and day, you can't even compare them..." As she said this, Guo Fu continuously spit, "Pui...pui...pui...pui..."

Guo Xiang ignored her and continued, "If you don't believe me that's up to you. He has a good character. If anyone is in trouble, he'd lend a hand whether he knows them or not." She lifted her head and started day-dreaming.

Guo Fu angrily said, "You're just making things up. Lu Youjiao's dead, now the Beggar Clan doesn't have a leader. Mother said that, since so many heroes are here for the Heroes' Meet, there will be a martial arts contest to pick a highly-skilled expert to lead the Beggar Clan and prevent it from splitting up into the Dirty Faction and Clean Faction again. You said this man is so powerful, tell him to spar with

your brother-in-law and see who will be the next Beggar Clan Leader.”

Guo Xiang laughed, “He doesn’t want to be the Beggar Clan Leader.”

Guo Fu scolded, “You dare to look down on the Leader’s status? Elder Hong was the leader, Mother was the leader; you dare to look down on Elder Hong and Mother?”

Guo Xiang said, “When did I say I looked down on the Leader? You knew Uncle Lu and I were good friends.”

Guo Fu said, “OK! Tell your grand hero to spar with your brother-in-law, and then we shall clearly see who the hero is and who the useless bum is.”

Guo Xiang said, “Sister, you always talk unreasonably. When did I say brother-in-law was a useless bum? If he’s one, then that makes you an animal. We have the same mother, so I’d be ashamed too.”

Guo Fu heard this and did not know whether to laugh or flare up, so she stood up and said, “I don’t have the energy to talk nonsense with you. If you still won’t come back, I’ll get a scolding too.”

Guo Xiang had a razor-sharp tongue and liked to argue with her sister, so she said, “Even though you’re married, Father and Mother dote on you the most. Who will have the guts to scold you if you are the wife of the next Clan Leader?”

Guo Fu heard her sister address her as the ‘wife of the next Clan Leader’, she became smug and said, “There are so many heroes here and he’s not the Leader yet; don’t say such things, you’ll only make people laugh.”

Guo Xiang woke up from her day-dream and saw that the pale moon was almost full. Then she sighed and said, “It

looks like Uncle Lu's spirit won't be coming. Sister, why the hurry to choose a new Leader? Why can't we mourn Uncle Lu a little longer?"

Guo Fu said, "You're being childish again. The Beggar Clan is the number one sect in Jianghu, how can it go without a leader even for a day?"

Guo Xiang said, "Which day did Mother say the Leader would be chosen?"

Guo Fu said, "The Heroes' Summit will start on the 15th, the most important issue is to discuss how to allocate all the heroes in Jianghu to resist the Mongolians. This should take about five to nine days, so the new leader should be chosen on the 23rd or 24th."

Guo Xiang exclaimed, "Ah."

Guo Fu asked, "What?"

Guo Xiang said, "Nothing. The 24th just happens to be my birthday. Everyone will be busy preparing for this Meet, so Mother won't be celebrating my birthday for me."

Guo Fu laughed, "Ha-ha, you're a little baby, what significance is your birthday? How can you put it on the same level as the Leader's selection? People would laugh their teeth out. Ah, there can only be one such person like you on this Earth, remembering such trivial matters."

Guo Xiang's face turned red, saying, "Father may not remember, but Mother will surely remember. You say it's a small matter, but I think otherwise. I'm going to be 16, you know?"

Guo Fu laughed even louder and needled her, "On that day all the heroes will congratulate our Miss Guo on her sixteenth

birthday. She's no longer a baby, she's a lady now! Ha...ha...ha!"

Guo Xiang shook her head and said, "Others might not care, but there will be at least one hero who will remember my birthday. He promised that he will come to see me." She felt very happy as she said this.

Guo Fu said, "What hero? Ah, is he the one who is superior to your brother-in-law? Let me tell you - Number 1, there's no such person, you're just fantasizing; Number 2, even if there's such a person, he must have many things to do, how would he have the time to celebrate your birthday? If he's attending the Heroes' Summit, then he will come to Xiangyang."

Guo Xiang heard this and was almost moved to tears. She stamped her feet and said, "He promised, he promised. He won't attend the Heroes' Summit; he won't vie to be the Leader."

Guo Fu said, "If he's not a hero, our parents would not invite him. Even if he comes, he may not be fit to attend."

Guo Xiang took out her handkerchief to dab her tears and said, "If that's the case, I won't attend the Heroes' Summit either, nor will I even look in at the Leader's selection."

Guo Fu coldly laughed, "Ah, Miss Guo's not attending the Heroes' Feast, all the grandeur is gone. Where's the glory of being the new Leader? Face it, nobody would miss you."

Guo Xiang covered her ears and dashed out of the temple.

Suddenly a black shadow flashed across and stood silently at the temple's entrance, blocking it. Guo Xiang was shocked and leapt back to prevent herself from running into him. The tall person stood under the moon light, exhibiting his dark face, but his upper body was rather short. Looking closely,

she noticed that he had two legs missing, his arms supporting his body with six-foot long crutches. His pants were very long, dangling on the ground, making him look like a giant.

Guo Fu was shocked and said, "You're Nimoxing?"

That person was indeed Nimoxing. This time the Khan was commanding the campaign himself, so all the brave warriors followed him north from Dali. The warriors all tried to prove themselves to win glory for their names. Although Nimoxing's legs were gone, he did not lose his martial skills; in fact he trained harder and he was better than before he lost his legs. The Mongols were still a hundred li from Xiangyang, but some warriors were sent ahead to Xiangyang to scout first, so Nimoxing reached Xiangyang earlier. On this night he was wandering around the temple and he overheard the Guo sisters' conversation. Then he got very excited, thinking that since Guo Jing was leading Xiangyang's defense, if he captured the Guo sisters he could force him to surrender or at least demoralize him and thus contribute greatly to the Mongol war effort. He heard that Guo Fu knew him, so he said, "Miss Guo is very sharp, I've not seen you for so many years and you have grown even more pretty. Don't cause any trouble, just be good and follow me!"

Guo Fu was shocked and angry. She knew his martial arts were very high, even if she and Guo Xiang attacked him together, they would still lose, so she could not help but glare at Guo Xiang, thinking, "It's entirely your fault, how are we going to get out of this mess?"

Guo Xiang asked Nimoxing, "Why are your two pant legs so strange? Were your legs very long before you lost them?"

Nimoxing snorted and ignored her, telling Guo Fu, "You two walk in front. Don't try any tricks!" He treated them as his prisoners as he said that.

Guo Xiang said, "You're talking very strangely. Where do you want to take us in the middle of the night?"

Nimoxing angrily said, "Little girl, just shut up and follow me." He was afraid that there might be strong opponents from Xiangyang coming to help, so he wanted to leave quickly.

Guo Fu whispered, "Sister, this black guy is a Mongolian warrior and his martial arts are great; you attack his right while I attack his left." She drew out her sword and thrust towards Nimoxing's waist.

Guo Xiang did not bring any weapons out of the city and thought that since he had lost his legs and was using his crutches to fight, how could he fight her sister? So she said, "Sister, this person is pitiful, don't hurt him!"

As she said this, Nimoxing braced his left crutch on the ground and defended himself with his right crutch. Then he struck Guo Fu's sword, causing sparks to fly and Guo Fu's sword to fly out of her hand. She felt her hand go numb and her chest was hurting. Then she used a special stance to follow the sword and retrieve it with her left hand. Striking forward with the 'Sword of the Yue Maiden' [Chao Nu Jian Fa] as she fought with Nimoxing. This 'Chao Nu Jian Fa' was taught to Guo Jing by Han Xiaoying of the Jiangnan Seven Freaks. Guo Jing taught this skill to his two daughters out of gratitude to her. This sword skill was smooth and contained subtle changes and was a powerful skill. If Guo Jing executed this skill, it would be strong and powerful and would not be overcome easily, but Guo Fu was not very strong; although the strokes were good, they were not good enough to defend against Nimoxing's crutches.

Guo Xiang saw how Nimoxing was using his crutches. The left and right crutches were swapping roles intermittently and were very swift. The crutches were long as well, so her sister

was losing to his fierce attacks. She then became more anxious. Guo Fu felt the pressure from his crutches getting stronger and stronger, hitting her sword with great force, causing her strokes to be unsteady. Guo Xiang was worried about her sister but was unarmed so she sent out her palms and struck towards Nimoxing.

Nimoxing shouted and poked his left crutch on the ground and leapt into the air, attacking with both crutches at great speed. The crutches hit Guo Xiang in the shoulder and Guo Fu in the chest. Guo Xiang stumbled and retreated several steps. Guo Fu was hit quite hard and could not withstand the pain and she sat down heavily. Nimoxing was feeling proud of himself and swaggered towards Guo Fu, laughing coldly, "I told you to be good and follow me..."

Guo Fu jumped up and said, "Let's escape from the back of the temple!"

Nimoxing was shocked. He had obviously hit her "Shen Cang" (Hiding Deity) Accupoint, how could she still move? He did not know about Guo Fu's soft armour and thought she must have learned some great skills from the Guo family that prevented her accupoint from being sealed. Actually, Guo Fu's accupoint was not sealed, but she was injured by that strike and could not use her sword. Guo Xiang then unleashed the 'Descending Hero's Palm Skill' [Luo Ying Zhang Fa] to protect her sister and shouted, "Sister, you go first!"

Nimoxing raised his left crutch and sent it towards Guo Xiang, stopping three inches in front of her nose, but the wind generated was so great that her face hurt. He shouted, "Don't move!"

Guo Xiang angrily said, "At first I pitied you, but you're such an evil person!"

Nimoxing laughed, "Little girl, if you don't suffer you won't know my strength." His crutch hit the ground, his face was fierce and ugly, he opened his mouth, exposing his white teeth and charged forwards screaming like he wanted to bite someone.

Suddenly someone behind said, "Don't be afraid! Use secret projectiles on him."

This was a dangerous moment and Guo Xiang did not care who that was and felt around her body and urgently said, "I don't have any." She saw Nimoxing getting closer and was at her wits' end and tried to use a palm stance called the 'Flower Spreading Stance' [Shan Hua Shi] to protect herself. She out stretched her palms and felt a breeze suddenly blow across them; then her hands trembled slightly and two thin golden bangles flew out, striking Nimoxing's crutches.

Although the sound made on impact was not very loud, Nimoxing knew he could not withstand it and his crutches flew backwards, hitting the wall, causing dust and mud to fly on impact. Nimoxing lost his crutches and fell down. He hit his back on the ground and then jumped up, screaming angrily and struck his palms out, sending his whole body forwards with his palms aiming at Guo Xiang.

Guo Xiang did not think and reacted by taking a hair pin out of her hair and tried to hit Nimoxing, then she felt the breeze behind her again and sent the pin flying forward. Nimoxing suddenly saw the pin flying towards him and quickly tried to use both hands to block, then he cried, "Strange!" and fell onto the ground, unmoving.

Guo Xiang feared that he was up to no good, so she jumped to Guo Fu and said, "Sister, let's go!"

The two sisters were standing next to a deity's statue in the temple and saw that Nimoxing did not move at all, so Guo Fu

said, "Did he suddenly have a stroke and die?" She raised her voice and said, "Nimoxing, what are you doing?" She thought that since he'd lost his crutches, it would not be convenient for him to move, so she was not afraid and advanced to him. She saw his eyes staring blankly upwards, his face without colour and his mouth wide open; he was dead.

Guo Fu was very surprised and lit the candles in the temple, wanting to investigate further when she heard someone outside the temple saying, "Fu, Second Sister, are you in the temple?" It was Yelu Qi. Guo Fu happily said, "Brother Qi, come quickly. Strange... this is strange!"

When Guo Fu went to find her sister and did not return for quite some time, Yelu Qi, remembering that Lu Youjiao was ambushed and killed and the enemy was just outside Xiangyang, got worried and went to find the two sisters. He brought two sixth grade Beggar Clan members and hurried there only to find Nimoxing dead on the ground, and he was shocked. He knew this short person's martial arts were good; even he could not handle this person himself, so he was surprised that his wife had killed Nimoxing. He took the candle from Guo Fu's hand and looked closely.

He saw two holes in Nimoxing's palms and a hair pin stuck in the Shen Ting (Deity's Hall) Accupoint. This pin hit with great force but did not break and instead was able to penetrate this highly-skilled expert's palms and kill him. Such a powerful skill like that is unthinkable. He turned to Guo Fu and said, "Is Grandfather here (referring to Huang Yaoshi), quickly lead me to greet him."

Guo Fu curiously said, "Who said Grandfather was here?"

Yelu Qi said, "It's not Grandfather?" He swept the place with his eyes and said excitedly, "So it must be Master." He looked around but could not find Zhou Botong. He knew his master was mischievous, so he must have hid himself to scare them.

He went out of the temple and jumped onto the roof, but he saw no one.

Guo Fu said, "Hey! Why are you saying such silly things? What Grandfather, what master?"

Yelu Qi then came down and asked how they met Nimoxing and how he met his end. Guo Fu told him, but she completely could not explain how her sister's hair pin could kill him. Yelu Qi said, "Some powerful hero must be helping Sister secretly. The only people I know with such martial arts are Father-in-law, Grandfather, Master, Reverend Yideng and the Golden Wheel Monk (Jinlun Fawang). Fawang is the Mongolian Guo Shi (Spiritual Leader), he wouldn't kill Nimoxing, while Reverend Yideng won't kill anyone, so I thought since it's not Grandfather; it must be Master. Sister, who do you think helped you?"

After Guo Xiang's hair pin killed Nimoxing, she immediately turned around but saw no one, and kept repeating "Don't be afraid! Use secret projectiles on him," to herself. She thought the voice familiar. She wondered if it could be Yang Guo. But as she thought of him, she said to herself, "That's impossible! It must be because I was thinking of him, and I mistook that voice for his." Yelu Qi saw that she seemed to be day-dreaming and might not have heard him.

Guo Fu saw that her sister's eyes were red and tears were streaming down her face and she was looking lost. Guo Fu thought she must be in a shock and held her hand, asking, "Sister, what's up with you?"

Guo Xiang trembled and her face turned red, saying, "Nothing."

Guo Fu said, "Brother-in-law was asking you who saved you just now, didn't you hear?"

Guo Xiang said, "Who saved me? It must be him! Who else would have such excellent skills?"

Guo Fu asked, "Him? Who's he? Is he the special hero you were talking about?"

Guo Xiang felt her heart beating heavily and quickly said, "No, no! I'm talking about Uncle Lu's spirit." Guo Fu spat "Pui" and threw down her hand. Guo Xiang said, "I didn't even see a shadow just now, it must be Uncle Lu secretly helping me. You know we were good friends when he was still alive."

Guo Fu half-believed what she said and was wondering if Lu Youjiao's spirit refused to go away. But if it was not a spirit, how could a person kill someone without even showing himself?

Yelu Qi took up Nimoxing's crutches and sighed, "This level of martial arts really commands admiration." Guo Fu and Guo Xiang looked carefully, observing that both crutches had a golden bangle lodged deep into them, as though they were made that way. This person actually used his internal energy (nei gong) to hit Nimoxing's crutches out of his hands, so it was no wonder Yelu Qi praised him like that.

Guo Fu said, "Let's bring them to Mother, she should know who did this."

The two beggars carried the body, the crutches and followed Yelu Qi and the two sisters back into the city. Guo Jing and Huang Rong heard Guo Fu's narration and thought about the matter, causing them to be shocked.

Guo Xiang thought she would surely be scolded by her parents for getting into such trouble again. However Guo Jing liked his daughter's deep loyalty so he consoled her instead. Huang Rong saw that he was not angry so she hugged her

and comforted her. She saw Nimoxing's body and crutches and said to Guo Jing, "Brother Jing, who do you think it is?"

Guo Jing shook his head and said, "This internal energy is so fierce and powerful, from what I know, only two people are capable of it."

Huang Rong said, "But Master Hong Qigong passed away long ago and it is not you." She asked for the details but could not think of an explanation.

After taking Guo Fu and Guo Xiang back to their rooms to rest, she said, "Brother Jing, our second lady has hidden something from us, do you know that?" Guo Jing curiously asked, "Hiding what?" Huang Rong said, "Ever since she returned from sending the Heroes' Summit invitations, she has been day-dreaming alone. Tonight she was speaking even more strangely." Guo Jing said, "She has suffered a shock, so she's not thinking clearly."

Huang Rong said, "No. Sometimes she would be shy, sometimes she would smile to herself, and this is obviously not symptoms of suffering a shock. She actually has a joy in her heart which she can't say." Guo Jing said, "When a child suddenly fights an expert, she would be shocked and happy, there's nothing strange about that." Huang Rong smiled and thought, "Regarding matters concerning a girl's heart, you didn't understand when you were young, now that you're old, what do you know?" They changed the topic, discussing strategies to defeat the enemy, how to welcome the guests to the Heroes' Summit, how to arrange the seating etc. before resting.

Huang Rong lay on her bed and thought of Guo Xiang's affairs and found it hard to sleep, so she thought, "This girl met with much hardship and troubles when she was born, I'm worried her life may be rather troubled. She has fortunately lived the past 16 years peacefully; don't tell me she will meet

with some serious disaster now?" She thought about the strong enemy's imminent attack and the impending hardships for the people. If she had some prior intelligence, it would greatly aid them. Yet her daughter has been very strange since birth. If she did not want to say something, she would not say it no matter how her parents coerced or scolded her. Instead her face would turn red but she would not reveal a single word. Her parents found it funny yet still got angry.

The more Huang Rong thought of it, the more worried she was, so she stood up and went to the city wall, ordering the guards to open the gate and she went to the Yang Tai Temple.

The sky was cloudy, hiding the Moon and the stars. Huang Rong took a white candle and used her qing gong (lightness skill) to ascend Mount Xian. Suddenly, she heard voices dozens of meters away near "Dropping Tears Tablet". She crouched down and crept forward and hid behind a tree several meters away, not moving any closer.

Someone said, "Brother Sun, the Benefactor told us to wait behind the Dropping Tears Tablet, but why does this place have such a unique name?"

The one named Sun said, "The Benefactor must have had some problematic affairs of the heart. So whenever he sees any place named Duan Chang (Severed Intestine), You Chou (Worries) or Duo Lei (Dropping Tears), he remembers them easily."

The first person said, "With the Benefactor's great skills, he should be able to solve any problem, but whenever I see his expression or hear his tone of voice, it seems like he has indeed some unhappy problems. I think he actually named this place Dropping Tears Tablet himself."

The one named Sun said, "No. I've always heard Master Guo'er Shu say that during the Three Kingdoms Period, Xiangyang belonged to the Wei Kingdom. The general in charge, Yang Hu, had great merit in administrating the city and protecting the people. He used to tour this mountain. When he was dead the people remembered his contributions and built the Yang Tai Temple on this mountain and made this tablet to remember him. When the people remembered what he had done for them, they would be moved to tears, so this place is called the 'Dropping Tears Tablet'. Brother Chen, someone who has done as much as Grand Elder Yang is really a great man."

The one named Chen said, "The Benefactor has done many heroic deeds and helped countless people around the world. If he were the general of Xiangyang, he may even be better than Yang Hu."

The one named Sun smiled, "Xiangyang's Hero Guo is defending the people and does many heroic deeds, so he must be on the same level as Grand Elder Yang and the Benefactor."

Huang Rong heard them praise her husband and was secretly pleased, but thought, "Who is the Benefactor they're referring to? Is he the one who secretly helped Xiang-Er?"

Then Mr. Sun said, "Long ago we were the Benefactor's enemies, then the Benefactor saved our lives; the Benefactor's kind personality of treating his enemies as his friends might be comparable with Grand Elder Yang Hu. About that story during the Three Kingdoms Period, that master also mentioned that when Yang Hu was protecting Xiangyang, the enemy opposing him was General Lu Xun's son Lu Kang of the Wu Kingdom. Yang Hu sent troops into Wu territory to fight the enemy, whenever he harvested the people's rice for his military provisions he would compensate

them. When Lu Kang was sick, Yang Hu sent medicine to him and Lu Kang took it without any suspicions. His lieutenants advised him to be careful, but he said, "Someone like Uncle Yang ("Zhen De Mu Pang Huan Xi Pang") did not resort to despicable tactics. Uncle Yang is Yang Hu. His character was above question and the enemy respected him. When he died, even the Wu Kingdom Generals mourned him. The way he treated others really made him deserve to be a hero."

(Some background information: the three countries of the Three Kingdom Period were Wu, Shu and Wei. Wei was controlled by Cao Cao and Wu by Sun Quan. When Shu's Liu Bei attacked Wu in retaliation for the killing of Guan Yu, Lu Xun defended Wu. He managed to destroy Liu Bei's 700,000 strong army with his 50,000 troops. Liu Bei did not listen to his advisor Zhuge Liang's advice. This Zhuge Liang of Xiangyang was mentioned in earlier chapters by Guo Jing.)

Mr. Chen kept sighing as he touched the stone tablet, then after a while he said, "The Benefactor told us to meet here, is it also to admire Grand Elder Yang's character?"

Mr. Sun said, "I heard the Benefactor mention before that when Yang Hu was alive there was a sentence that he always remembered."

Mr. Chen asked, "What was that? Say it slowly, I must memorize this. If the Benefactor admired it, this sentence must be something great."

Mr. Sun said, "After Lu Kang died, the Lord of the Wu Kingdom said that Yang Hu treated the Wu Kingdom sincerely and saved many Wu Kingdom citizens, but he was serving the traitors of the Imperial Court, so Yang Hu sighed, 'Tian Xia Bu Ru Yi Si, Shi Chang Ju Qi Ba' (easy matters are often complicated). The Benefactor praised these words."

Mr. Chen never expected it to be such a sentence and was slightly disappointed and sighed, then suddenly said loudly, "Brother Sun, Yang Hu – this name sounds the same..."

Mr. Sun said, "Hush! Someone's here."

Huang Rong was slightly surprised, and then she heard someone running round the mountain. Then she thought, "Sounds the same as 'Yang Hu' but uses different characters? Could it be 'Yang Guo'? No, no way. Even if Guo'er's martial arts have improved, it can't have reached such an unimaginable level. This person couldn't be saying that it sounds the same but uses different characters."

After a short while, the person ascending the mountain clapped lightly thrice and Mr. Sun returned three claps. That person walked to the Dropping Tears Tablet and said, "Brothers Sun and Chen, the Benefactor tells you not to wait for him; here are two invitations from the Benefactor, please help him deliver them. Brother Sun, this invitation is for Old Master Zhao of Henan's Xinyang Mansion on Crows Mountain; Brother Chen, this invitation is for the deaf-mute Head Camel of Hu Nan's Changde Mansion. Please tell them that they are requested to meet here within ten days." Mr. Chen and Mr. Sun respectfully agreed, they took the invitations and placed them in their inner pockets.

When Huang Rong heard this, she was greatly surprised. Old Master Zhao of Xinyang was working for the Imperial Court, his Thirty-two Long Punches and Eighteen Rod Stances were the special skills of his family and were passed from generation to generation within his family. He was a nobleman and never bothered about Jianghu affairs. The Head Camel of Crows Mountain was a famous elder in Wulin, his martial arts were very good, but because he was a deaf-mute, he seldom mixed with outsiders. For this Heroes' Summit at Xiangyang, Guo Jing and Huang Rong knew these

two people liked seclusion and would not attend the meet, but they still respected their reputation and sent them invitations. Obviously they replied and declined. Could it be that this so-called 'Benefactor' has such a great influence on them and is able to draw them out of seclusion and hurry them here based on his invitation alone?

Then Huang Rong thought again, "The Heroes Meet would start tomorrow and this person is summoning all the experts in Jianghu to Xiangyang, what is his motive? Could he actually be helping the Mongols? That'd be unfavorable for us." Then she felt that although Old Master Zhao and Deaf-Mute Head Camel were loners, they were not traitors. This 'Benefactor' secretly helped Xiang'er kill Nimoxing, so he must not be one of them.

As she was talking to herself, she heard the three people talking softly but she could not hear clearly as she was too far away, then she heard Mr. Chen say, "Benefactor has never entrusted us with such an important assignment, this assignment will... it would be a grand event... our present..." She missed several words in between. Mr. Sun said, "OK! Let's do it. Rest assured we will not mess up the Benefactor's plans." When he said that, the three people descended the mountain.

Huang Rong could not guess the origin of that 'Benefactor' but she did not want to blow things up by capturing the three people to ask about the matter. When they were gone far, she went into the temple and looked around but did not see anything amiss. When the enemy attacked the area, all the worshippers and caretakers at the temple fled into the city so there was no one there. When she went back, it was already dawn.

When she was near the city's west gate, two horses charged along the road and she had to leap aside to avoid them. She

saw two big and strong men riding the horses. The two horses went to the intersection and separated, with one heading west and the other heading south. She heard one of them say, "You must remember to tell Fat Zhang that he must bring the musical instruments and the show's costumes himself. And don't forget to bring decorations experts." The other laughed, "Don't nag at me, if you're late by one day in inviting Master Chuan Chai, even if the Benefactor forgives you, we won't." The first man laughed, "Hey, that's alright. If I'm late by one day, cut off my head to feed the pigs." The two men saluted each other and rode off.

As Huang Rong entered the city, she mumbled to herself, "I heard Fat Zhang is a tyrant, even chivalrous outlaws respected him, and how could this 'Benefactor' get him here with one word? They talked about flags and drums, what could they be used for?" Suddenly she thought of something and said, "Yes, yes! It must be so."

She went into the Government Office and asked Guo Jing, "Brother Jing, did we miss out any invitations?"

Guo Jing curiously said, "How could we have missed anything? We checked for many days, it couldn't have happened."

Huang Rong said, "I think so too; we must have offended a great hero who's not that famous, so he sent invitations to those who obviously won't come. From the way it looks, it must be a great man who's dissatisfied with us, so he also wants to host another Heroes' Summit to compete with us."

Guo Jing happily said, "This hero has the same motives as us, nothing could be better. We will invite him to chair the Heroes' Summit and get him to command the heroes to defend against the Mongolians; it's alright for the both of us to listen to him."

Huang Rong frowned and said, "But from what I hear of him, he might not be here to defend the city. He sent invitations to Xingyang's Old Master Zhao, Deaf-Mute Head Camel of Crows Mountain and Hankou's Fat Zhang and others."

Guo Jing was surprised and happy; he clapped and said, "If this man can invite such great people here, Xiangyang would be strengthened. Rong'er, we must definitely meet such a man."

Huang Rong became quiet. She knew that the beggars from Jiangnan would arrive soon, so Guo Jing and Huang Rong went forth to welcome them. On that day heroes from all around Jianghu arrived and Huang Rong was so busy entertaining the guests that she almost had no time to breathe and of course forgot the events of the previous night.

The next day was the banquet for the 'Heroes' Summit, and the heroes sat around four hundred-odd tables, with Xiangyang's Commander General Lu Wende and Defense Official General Wang Jian offering toasts to the heroes. The people in the banquet hall talked about the Mongols' cruelty and how they invaded Song territory and killed its citizens. All the heroes expressed their indignation and their will to fight the invaders. That night everyone unanimously elected Guo Jing to chair the Meet and they swore to kill the invaders.

Guo Xiang and her sister argued at the temple the other night and she said she would not attend the 'Heroes' Summit. Of course she was absent and was instead dining in her own room alone. She told the servant, "Sister is attending the 'Heroes' Summit while I'm here comfortably drinking wine. She may not be as happy as I am." Guo Jing and Huang Rong were occupied with strategies to defeat the enemy, how could they care about what their daughter was doing? Guo Jing did not even know her whereabouts nor bother to find

out. Huang Rong asked around but knew her daughter's strange character so she could only laugh.

Many of the heroes present had great capacity for liquor and felt that the wine was excellent, their spirits were boosted and they displayed their martial skills. Huang Rong missed her daughter and told Guo Fu, "Go get your sister here to join in the fun. This kind of grand occasion occurs only once in a lifetime."

Guo Fu said, "No way am I going. Sister is unhappy now and is waiting for any opportunity to argue with me, I'm not going to bang my head against the wall."

Guo Polu said, "I'll get her here." He hurriedly left and walked towards her room.

After a short while Guo Polu returned alone; before he could say anything Guo Fu said, "Didn't I say she wouldn't come?"

Huang Rong saw her son's face was devoid of colour and asked, "What did she say?"

Guo Polu said, "She said she's hosting a mini 'Heroes' Summit in her room, so she won't be attending the major 'Heroes' Summit."

Huang Rong smiled, "Only your sister can think of such crazy things, leave her alone."

Guo Polu said, "But she has guests. Five males and two females are drinking inside Sister's room."

Huang Rong frowned and thought that this girl was getting more and more out of hand. How could a young girl invite men to her room to dine? Her 'Little Eastern Heretic' nickname was indeed fully deserved, but today there were many guests so she could not be punished and spoil the atmosphere. So she told Guo Fu, "Your brother is young and

doesn't know how to entertain guests, you go. Invite your sister's friends to the banquet as well, so that we can get to know each other."

Guo Fu was curious to find out what sort of guests her sister had. She knew her sister did not bother about what was proper between males and females and enjoyed making friends with all kinds of people. She thought these people must be thugs or similar characters. When she heard her mother instruct her to do so, she immediately got up and went to Guo Xiang's room.

As she stood near the door, she heard Guo Xiang say, "Little Wooden Head, tell the kitchen to send another two pots of wine." 'Little Wooden Head' was a maid and Guo Xiang had given her the unusual nickname. The maid acknowledged the order. Then she heard Guo Xiang say again, "Tell the kitchen to cook another two goats' legs and 20 jin of beef." The maid replied affirmatively and exited the room. Then from the room came a rough voice saying, "Miss Guo is frank and straightforward, too bad I, Ren Chuzi, didn't know that before or I'd have been friends with you long ago." Guo Xiang laughed, "Becoming friends now is not too late."

Guo Fu frowned and looked through the window slit. She saw a short table in her sister's room and there were many wine cups on the table. The eight people were sitting on the floor and drinking merrily. There was a fat man facing her with his shirt exposing half his chest, showing his thick and black chest hair. On his left was a scholar with neat clothes and he was fanning himself lightly with his fan, appearing to be refined. His fan had a drawing of a ghost sticking out its tongue. On his left was a woman of about forty years old with a delicate face, but her face had around ten sword scars. Sitting opposite her was a tall and skinny camel-like man with a shiny golden head-dress and his mouth was biting into half a chicken and eating joyously. There were three whose

backs were facing the window, so Guo Fu could not see their faces. She saw that two of them were white haired men while the other was a black-clad priestess. Guo Xiang was sitting in between them and her face was red like an apple, her eyes showed signs of her consuming liquor and she was talking merrily. Guo Fu thought they were so happy here, if she invited them to the banquet they looked like they would not go.

Then one of the white-haired men stood up and said, "Today's feast is almost over, on this lady's birthday, we shall come and drink again. This old man has a small gift; it might make the lady laugh." As he said that he took out a box and placed it on the table. The other old man said, "Bai Chaoxian, what are you giving her, let me see." He then flipped open the box and could not help but draw in his breath sharply, saying, "Ah, this is a thousand-year-old snow Ginseng, did you get it from the bottom of the river?" He placed it in his palm.

Guo Fu saw him holding a foot-long snowy white Ginseng, with its 'head', 'body' 'hands' and 'feet' all in place and showing a slight trace of red, indicating that it was a rare and exclusive Ginseng root.

The people all praised it and that old man was very proud; then he said, "This snow Ginseng can cure terminal diseases, neutralize hundreds of poisons; it's even said to be able to resurrect a person. This lady will live to be a hundred, so she doesn't have to use it. But on her 100th birthday, she just may need to take it so she can live for another 100 years." The people all clapped and praised him.

The fat Ren Chuzi took out a money box from his bosom and laughed, "This is a small toy, and hopefully it can amuse the lady." He opened the box and took out two metal-cast monks of around seven inches tall and activated a mechanism,

causing the monks to exchange punches and kicks. The people all laughed as they watched this. The monks displayed strokes from Shaolin's Luo Han boxing, and exchanged dozens of moves before stopping, then standing at attention, which was the style of highly-skilled Shaolin monks.

The people all stopped laughing when they saw this and their faces changed colour. The scar-faced woman said, "Ren Chuzi, don't bring trouble to Miss Guo! This is the metal Luo Han from the Shaolin Temple, how could you steal them?"

Ren Chuzi laughed, "Heh-heh, even if I'm not afraid of the sky or the Earth, I wouldn't dare steal anything from the Shaolin Temple. This was given to me by Reverend Wuse of the Shaolin Temple's Luo Han Hall. The elder said when this lady celebrates her birthday, quickly go down to Xiangyang to wish her a happy birthday. Eh, this is my gift." He took off the inner lid from the box and took out a black jade bangle.

The black bangle looked dull and nothing special. Ren Chuzi then drew a thick-backed ghost-headed knife from his waist and chopped down on the bangle. The knife hit the bangle with a 'dang' sound and flew upwards, not even leaving a scratch on the bangle. The people all cheered, then the scholar, priestess, Head Camel and the woman all presented their gifts to Guo Xiang, all highlighting how unique their gifts were. Guo Xiang smiled happily as she received the gifts.

Guo Fu was more and more curious and surprised, so she headed back to the banquet hall and told everything to Huang Rong.

When Huang Rong heard this, she was even more surprised than Guo Fu, so she waved to Zhu Ziliu and the three people went to Guo Xiang's room. Huang Rong told her daughter to repeat the story. Zhu Ziliu was equally surprised and said,

“Ren Chuzi and Bai Chaoxian actually came to Xiangyang? That black-robed priestess should be the Merciless Killer Priestess Shenyang. The scholar’s fan has a drawing of a ghost, hmm; he should be the Turning Wheel King Zhang Yimang.” As he said this, Huang Rong nodded her head. Zhu Ziliu kept shaking his head instead, saying, “There’s nothing much to this. Miss Guo has never gone beyond 10 li of Xiangyang except for once recently, how could she get to know such strange people? Moreover, I heard Shaolin Temple’s Reverend Wuse has not shown his face in recent years; even eminent people of Wulin who visit the Shaolin Temple don’t get to see him. Why would he come to Xiangyang to wish a girl happy birthday? Hmm, maybe she just wants to fool around with her sister by coming up with this.”

Huang Rong said lowly, “But we seldom mention people like Priestess Shenyang and Zhang Yimang, so even if Xiang’er knew, she couldn’t have thought of this.”

Zhu Ziliu said, “Then it must be true. Let’s go take a look and meet them. Since they’re her friends, they wouldn’t have any bad intentions by coming to Xiangyang.”

Huang Rong said, “I think so too, but people like Priestess Shenyang and Turning Wheel King Zhang Yimang are hard to classify as good or bad. Although this is not a big problem, it is enough to cause a headache. Here we are defending against the enemy and now we’re not sure how to deal with these weird people...”

Suddenly someone outside the window laughed, saying, “Madam Guo, this group of people are visiting Xiangyang only to convey our birthday wishes, we have no other intentions, why the headache? When the last few words were heard, the voice was already far away. Huang Rong, Zhu Ziliu and Guo Fu went to the window together and saw black

shadows flashing out and disappearing behind the wall. Guo Fu wanted to give chase but was held back by Huang Rong, who said, "Don't bother; you can't catch up with them!" Then they saw a white fan hanging from a tree branch outside.

That fan was up in the tree about four yards away, Guo Fu knew she couldn't reach it and called, "Mother!" Huang Rong nodded her head, and lightly leapt forwards and grabbed a branch with her left hand, then flipped around and grabbed another branch with her right hand. She caught the fan and lightly jumped to the ground.

The three people went back indoors and under the candle light, saw the drawing of a ghost sticking out its tongue with a silly grin and both hands clutched together. On the side were several words, "Wishing Miss Guo many happy returns and living to a ripe old age." Huang Rong flipped over the fan and the words said, "Black-robed priestess Shenyong, Bai Chaoxian, Jiu Sisen, Dog-meat Head Camel, Han Wugou and Zhang Yimang greet Hero Guo and Madam Guo. We celebrated your daughter's birthday without permission, we apologize for the offence."

Zhu Ziliu was an expert in calligraphy, so he praised, "Good, good calligraphy!"

Huang Rong said, "Let's go see Xiang'er."

Zhu Ziliu was already quite old and was not suspicious of the girl so they all went into Guo Xiang's room. They saw Little Wooden Head and another servant clearing the dishes. Guo Xiang said, "Uncle Zhu, Mother, Sister, look at the birthday gifts my guests have given me."

When Huang Rong and Zhu Ziliu saw the snow Ginseng, twin iron Luo Han statues, black jade bangle and the other presents, they both praised and marveled at them. Guo Xiang activated the mechanism and the two Luo Han statues

started to spar, which made her feel really proud. Huang Rong watched the Luo Han perform the Luo Han Boxing. When they had finished she gently asked, “Xiang’er, what’s going on? Tell Mother.”

Guo Xiang laughed and said, “A few new friends knew my birthday is approaching, so they gave me these amusing things.”

Huang Rong asked, “How did you get to know these people?”

Guo Xiang said, “I got to know them only today. I was alone in the room drinking wine, when Sister Han Wugou stood outside the window and asked, ‘Little lady, we’d like to come in and drink with you, alright?’ I said, ‘Nothing could be better, please come in!’ All of them jumped in through the window then said that on the 24th itself they would come and celebrate my birthday. How do they know my birthday? Mother, they are yours and Father’s friends, right? Or why else would they give me such wonderful things?”

Huang Rong said, “Your Father and I don’t know them. You met some strange friends by appointment, true?”

Guo Xiang laughed, “I don’t have any strange friends, unless it’s Brother-in-law.”

Guo Fu angrily said, “Rubbish! How can your brother-in-law be a strange man?”

Guo Xiang stuck out her tongue and laughed, “After he married you, how can he not be strange?” Guo Fu stretched out her hand to hit her but Guo Xiang laughed and evaded to the side.

Huang Rong said, “You two stop it. Xiang’er, let me ask you, did the Turning Wheel King, Bai Chaoxian (Hundred Plants Deity) and the others say anything about attending the ‘Heroes’ Summit?”

Guo Xiang said, "No, but they said they admire and respect Father."

She asked a few more questions and felt that Guo Xiang was not hiding anything so she said, "OK! Go to sleep." Then she, Zhu Ziliu and Guo Fu went out.

Guo Xiang ran to the door and said, "Mother, this snow Ginseng seems to be rather useful, you take half and Father can take the other half."

Huang Rong said, "But this was given to you as a birthday present!"

Guo Xiang said, "After I was born I didn't do anything much, but you have suffered." Huang Rong did not want to reject her daughter's filial wishes so she took the Ginseng and thought back to Guo Xiang's hardships when she was born and sighed.

The 'Heroes' Feast had dispersed happily and Guo Jing returned to his room. He told his wife about the heroes' determination to drive out the enemy and expressed his joy. Huang Rong then told him about Priestess Shenyang, Bai Chaoxian etc. visiting Guo Xiang.

Guo Jing was surprised, saying, "There's such a thing?" Then he looked at the snow Ginseng and knew that it was a rare and precious gift.

Huang Rong laughed, "Looks like our precious lady's influence far surpasses her parents'." Guo Jing remained silent and bowed his head, thinking about the people she mentioned.

Huang Rong said, "Brother Jing, maybe we should host the Beggar Clan Leader's Selection earlier and not postpone Guo Xiang's birthday. If those people actually come, we might not

be able to deal with them while we're busy with the Leader's Selection."

Guo Jing said, "I have another idea. Let's hold it on her birthday itself instead. Then if they actually turn up we can invite them to battle the enemy with us, won't that be great?"

Huang Rong frowned and said, "I'm afraid they're only using Guo Xiang's birthday as an excuse to come, but are actually coming here to cause trouble. Just think what could their relationship with Xiang'er be? Could they be here just to celebrate her birthday? 'A big tree will catch more wind'; there might be many people in Wulin who're not willing to let you be the Chancellor of Wulin."

Guo Jing stood up and laughed, saying, "Rong'er, when it comes to fighting the enemy, the more people the better. Someone else being the Chancellor of Wulin, it would still be the same. Moreover, evil cannot triumph over good; if they're really here to create trouble, we'll entertain them. Your "Dog Beating" skill and my "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms" have not seen action for several years but they may not be rusty yet."

Huang Rong saw that he was in good spirits so she laughed, "OK! We'll do as you say. You take this Snow Ginseng; I think it's worth three to five years of training."

Guo Jing said, "No! You've had three children; your internal strength is weakened, so you should take it."

The husband and wife were very loving and kept pushing the Ginseng to each other for half a day. Guo Jing finally said, "There will be fierce and brutal battles in the coming days and many of our friends will be injured. This snow Ginseng can save many lives, so let's keep it for then."

End of Chapter 35.

Chapter 36 - The Birthday Celebration

Translated by Frans Soetomo



The Ghosts released the fireworks one by one, and they formed a string of characters that read, "Wishing the Second Miss Guo prosperity and longevity!" Each character had its own color and they stayed afloat for quite some time. Everybody cheered.

The following day was the beginning of the Heroes' Summit. Guo Xiang had decided not to join the feast, so Huang Rong had instructed their kitchen workers to prepare some food for her to have her own feast. Guo Fu had been musing for several days on the possibilities as to how her husband would win the Beggar Clan Chief position, so her sister's special feast was very far from her mind.

The Heroes' Summit continued for the next several days. Among other things, they discussed plans on how to unite the valiant and patriotic men and women across the country; plans on how to disrupt the Mongolian troop's swift movements, and plans on how to reinforce Xiangyang's defenses. Everything was properly discussed. The attendees were itching to fight the enemy; they were impatient to slaughter the arriving enemy troops. Guo Jing was happy to see the group's boldness even though he was aware of the strength of the Mongolian army for a long time; definitely not the match for these several thousands Jianghu people. Hence he could not avoid feeling anxious.

The Summit was concluded on the twenty-fourth of the third month, with a very satisfactory result. Just before the closing ceremony, everybody agreed to have the Beggar Clan Chief's election around noon that very same day. And so it was, right after lunch, everybody headed toward the field used for military exercises on the west side. Upon arrival, they all saw a huge stage located right in the middle of the field. On and around the stage nothing was set, not a single chair. This was

in accordance to the Beggar Clan rules and regulations, no matter how big or how small a meeting was, beggars could not lose their identity by sitting on chairs. Toward the south of the stage there were hundreds of chairs prepared for 'outsiders'.

Before one o'clock there were more than two thousand Clan members sitting around the stage. They were the higher level members of the clan. The lowest grade was the fourth. According to the Clan bylaws, these two thousand some members were under the direction of four elders.

There were originally four Elders of the Beggar Clan, namely Elder Lu, Elder Jian, Elder Liang and Elder Peng. Lu Youjiao was promoted to be the Clan Leader, but met a tragic end just recently. Elder Peng had become a traitor and was killed by the Monk Ci'en. Elder Jian had died due to his old age and ailments. Therefore, Elder Liang held the highest position in the Clan. He had three eighth grade disciples as the newly appointed Elders assisting him.

The beggars ushered thousands of valiant men and women from the Heroes' Summit to the chairs. Yelu Qi and his wife Guo Fu, Wu Dunru and his wife Yelu Yan, Wu Xiuwen and his wife Wanyan Ping and the other younger generation sat towards the back. They had trained hard for more than ten years and had achieved significant improvements; they secretly wondered if they would have any opportunity to show off their skills in front of the several thousands heroes that day.

Guo Polu was sitting next to his eldest sister, watching this magnificent setting with awe. He whispered, "Second Sister is so weird. Why doesn't she come and attend this meeting?"

"What's inside that 'Little Eastern Heretic's' mind, nobody can guess," Guo Fu snickered.

In not too long, an eighth grade disciple toward the east side stood up and blew a giant shell horn, “whooh ... whooh ... whooooo ...!” It was the signal that the appointed time had come (it was between one and three in the afternoon).

While the sound of the horn was fading away, Huang Rong leaped on stage and bowed in all directions. She then began her oration with a loud and clear voice. “Today is the big meeting day of our clan. On behalf of the Beggar Clan, I would like to extend our gratitude and respect to all Seniors and Heroes who have made the effort to join us here.” She then bowed one more time, and the guests reciprocated.

“Our beloved leader, the late Chief Lu, was a wise and patriotic man, who devoted his life to the clan and our nation,” Huang Rong continued. “Unfortunately, he was cowardly attacked and killed by that scoundrel Hou Du at the Yang Tai Fu Temple over the hill yonder. This is an un-avenged deep resentment, not mentioning great disgrace to our Clan ...”

These words created loud response from the Beggar Clan members. They remembered Lu Youjiao’s benevolent heart, his impartiality and his patriotism. They were very saddened by his death. Some were sobbing loudly, while the others cursed Hou Du uncontrollably.

After the commotion subsided, Huang Rong continued, “By keeping in mind that the Mongols might attack any moment, we have made the decision not to put our Clan’s need above that of our country. Therefore, we will hold the thought of revenge until a more appropriate time, and we will discuss this matter at length after we defeat the enemies.”

This statement was met by the unanimous approval of the beggars.

“With Chief Lu’s untimely death comes another more pressing matter,” Huang Rong said, “our Clan member’s number in the tens of thousands, scattered across the country. They cannot be left leaderless. Therefore, we have to elect a new Clan Chief, today. We need someone wise and benevolent, who knows martial arts as well as literature, and who will have the love and respect of our entire clan. As to how we are going to elect such leader, Little sister will have to ask Elder Liang to give us further instructions.”

In another moment Elder Liang stood ready on stage. His hair was silvery-white, but his body still erect and his movements fluid. This Elder was welcomed with loud cheering and applause from the audience. In this gathering of about four or five thousands attendees, the applause resembled the rumble of thunder in the middle of the day.

Elder Liang cupped his fists to thank the people for the applause and after it subsided he said, “Former Chief Huang is exceptionally intelligent. What she just said would not be incorrect. She was just being modest by asking the four elders plus the eight eighth grade members to decide on how to elect the new chief. What ability do we, twelve smelly beggars, have in such an important matter?”

Elder Liang paused for a few seconds. The field was quiet. Everybody was straining their ears to hear what this Elder had to say.

After sending his penetrating gaze across the field, Elder Liang continued, “In our humble opinion, even though the beggars are good for nothing, we do have a great number of members scattered throughout the country. As Former Chief Huang has mentioned, we cannot afford to be without a leader. We need a leader who is wise, benevolent and highly skilled in martial arts and literature. We believe with all of our hearts, that leaders like Former Chief Hong Qigong and

Former Chief Huang are one in a million. Leaders like the late Chief Lu, who was loved by all of us. These are not easy to duplicate. Therefore, after a long and careful deliberation, we came to conclusion that the best course to take is to ask Former Chief Huang to get her feet wet and again lead our Clan.” Speaking to this point he paused again because the audience burst out in cheers and applause, even louder than the previous one. The audience thought, “A talented person of Huang Rong’s caliber is not easy to find in the world, let alone within the Beggar Clan.”

Elder Liang waited for the applause to subside; then he continued “If she refuses, then we’ll have to ask again and again. Unfortunately for us, we have a bigger problem threatening our country. The Mongolian armies are attacking Xiangyang and, as a devoted wife as well as a patriot, Former Chief Huang has to stand by the side of Chivalrous Hero Guo (Guo Da Xia) to defeat the enemy and defend our country. This is a formidable task to bear. Thus, if we bother Former Chief Huang with all the nitty-gritty business of the Beggar Clan, wouldn’t the people across the nation curse us stinky beggars until our deaths? And so, after careful consideration, we have made our final decision: Elect a new Chief.”

Elder Liang’s oration was received with nods across the field; the audience thought, “The Beggar Clan truly knows how to place important matters above their own; no wonder they’ve enjoyed the respect of the Jianghu people for hundreds of years.”

“As of now, inside our clan, we do not have someone capable of bearing the burden, and Former Chief Huang herself can not divide her attention for us,” Elder Liang resumed, “The only way we could think of was to invite someone outside our Clan to lead us. This special provision has happened before at the Mount Jun Summit, when we elected Former Chief Huang as our new Chief. As you are all aware, Former Chief

Huang was not a member of our Clan. Needless to say, I was not alone in voicing our discontent and that resulted in a battle. What was the outcome? Ha-ha...! We were beaten and could not help but be subdued by her. Very fortunate for us, since once Former Chief Huang took the lead, our Beggar Clan has developed into a great Clan like the one you all see today. I remember...I can still see it clear as day...how at the Mount Jun Summit Former Chief Huang was still in her teens. By using a mere stick she beat us four Elders into submission. Ha! Now THAT was what I call a hero!" [the word 'hero' here is Ying Xiong - valiant person, not Xia of Da Xia]

Listening to him, everyone's eyes turned involuntarily to Huang Rong. There were a number among the beggars who had attended the Mount Jun Summit. Their hearts were beating faster, as they saw in their minds what happened there when they were still very young.

"At today's meeting we have the valiant people of the Jianghu world in attendance," Elder Liang continued, "Any one of these valiant people deserves to be our leader. However, with so many valiant people around, we do not know how to pick one. Therefore, again after careful consideration, we twelve smelly beggars, decided on an election method that's less than perfect. The method is this: We would like the heroes to show their skills on this stage. Who's strong and who's weak, will be evident to all."

His speech was received with a soft murmur from the audience in every direction. Elder Liang continued, "But I want to stress one very important point. In today's match, as soon as somebody is touched by an opponent, the match has to stop. If anybody is heavily injured or even dies here, we cannot bear the heavy responsibility. If any of you has any grudge against anybody else, we would ask that you do not try to solve the grudge on this stage. If you ignore this

warning, then our Clan does not have any choice but to act accordingly.”

Having said this, he again sent his piercing gaze across the field. Elder Liang thought it was necessary to issue this warning, because if blood were involved in the election process, and valiant people fight violently with each other, then Guo Jing and Huang Rong’s effort to unite the country would be in vain. Elder Liang implied that whoever took any advantage to commit murder would be attacked by all the Beggar Clan’s members.

The valiant people in attendance today were aware that the Beggar Clan Chief election would be exciting; listening to Elder Liang’s speech they began to assess their own abilities. The Seniors, like clan or sect leaders, and those who had a high reputations in the Jianghu world, obviously did not want to fight over the Chief position. They had too many things at stake; not only the shame of defeat, but their reputation as well. Only those forty years and younger were excited and wanted to try. But since there were so many other valiant people around, plus the fact they had to win over the hearts of tens of thousands of beggars, nobody was bold enough to step up. They thought that to compete early meant they had to defeat more people.

After waiting some time, there were still no takers, then Elder Liang shouted, “Except for some Seniors and Heroes who live in seclusion, I can safely say that all the valiant people under the sky are gathered here. Whoever is willing to honor our Clan is welcome to give us a lesson or two. Our own Beggar Clan disciples who think they have some ability are also welcome to step up.”

After repeating his invitation several times there came a loud shout; “I am coming!” A shadow was seen jumping on to the stage. The audience was startled. This man was huge, like a

giant, maybe over 300 jins; the stage swayed a little bit when he landed. Without showing any respect he put his hands on his hips and said with a loud voice, "I am the Thousand-Jin-Giant, Tong Dahai. I don't want to be Clan Chief, but who ever want to fight let them come."

Everybody laughed. They thought they would enjoy a funny show from this silly giant.

"Brother Tong," said Elder Liang, smiling, "This stage is not a sparring ring. If Brother does not wish to become our Chief, then I would ask that you leave."

Tong Dahai shook his big head, "This is obviously a sparring ring, who said it is not? If you don't want a fight, why did you invite people up here?" Before Elder Liang had a chance to respond, he quickly said, "All right. Why don't you fight me?" Having said this he immediately thrust his fist toward Elder Liang's face.

Elder Liang leaped back, still smiling, "Brother Tong, I am an old man. How could I face your huge fist?"

The giant laughed heartily. With a delighted look on his face he said, "You go away ..." but before he could finish his sentence, a shadow flashed by, and on that stage stood a beggar with ragged clothes.

That beggar was around thirty years of age and had six bags on his back. He was one of Elder Liang's own grand martial disciples. He was also a rash man that could not contain himself upon seeing Tong Dahai being disrespectful toward his Grand Martial Master. "Brother Tong, you are not worthy to fight my Grand Martial Master," he said, "Let me accompany you for three stances."

"Nothing better than that!" the giant shouted, and without asking the beggar's name, he thrust his fist toward the

beggar's chest, "Watch out!"

The beggar turned his back and "smack!" that fist hit the sack on his back.

Tong Dahai felt his fist was hitting something soft and slippery. "What's inside your bag?" he asked.

The beggar snickered. "What's a beggar's usual catch?" he asked in response.

Tong Dahai was shocked. "Snake ...!" he cried.

"Yes, it's a snake!" the beggar answered.

Tong Dahai was half disgusted and half furious. He sent another fist toward the beggar's face. But the beggar was quick. In a flash he leaped high into the air and did a somersault and again turned his back toward the giant.

Tong Dahai was afraid the snake would bite him, or perhaps his fist would hit the snake's fangs; his movements became awkward since he was trying to avoid hitting the beggar's back. He delivered a right foot kick instead. The beggar knew the giant was afraid and he wanted to have some fun. While rolling himself on the stage, he quickly took his backpack and placed it on his calf. Actually the snake inside his bag was tame, and it had no venomous teeth, but Tong Dahai did not know this. He was getting anxious because his attacks gave him no desirable results. Suddenly the beggar's right hand grabbed his chest. "Wu Zixu lifts high the Thousand-Jin-Giant [play of words: 'wu zi' means 'five kids']," he said, and lifted the giant's body high in the air.

Because the 'zi gong' [purple palace] accupoint on his chest was sealed, Tong Dahai was helpless, and the audience burst into laughter.

“Let him go! Don’t be rude!” barked Elder Liang, but he could not help laughing too.

“All right,” the beggar complied. He let the giant go, and jumping down from the stage, he vanished amongst the crowd.

Tong Dahai’s face was purple with rage; he was embarrassed and angry at the same time. “Stinky beggar!” he cursed, “Come! Let’s fight again with weapons. What good is running away like that? Stinky Beggar! Sickly Beggar!” The beggars just laughed, and nobody paid him any attention.

Suddenly, another shadow leaped in, and when his left foot reached the stage, he staggered like he was going to fall down.

Tong Dahai was reckless, but not wicked. He shouted, “Watch out!” and immediately moved forward to hold the man. It turned out that the man was only pretending. He wanted to show off in front of all the valiant people. He quickly grabbed the giant’s hand, and pushed with the ‘The Heavenly King Falling Down’ move [dao die jin gang]. Tong Dahai’s body was thrown to the ground. The audience looked at that neatly dressed, long eye-browed handsome young man, who was none other than Wu Xiuwen, Guo Jing’s disciple.

Guo Jing – who sat on the front row, was irritated with Wu Xiuwen’s behavior; his countenance changed. And he was not alone. But before he could do anything, shouts were heard from east and west of the stage: “Good martial arts! Let me accept a lesson or two from you!” “What did you do?” “You repaid kindness with rudeness.” Three men had jumped on stage.

At that time, Wu Xiuwen could be regarded as a first class fighter among the younger generation. Not only had he received tutelage from Guo Jing and Huang Rong, but also

the Solitary Yang Finger from his own father and martial uncles. Seeing three men on stage, he was delighted. "Let me beat them once and for all," he thought.

He didn't want those three to take turns fighting him, so without saying anything he attacked all three of them. Those three had just landed their feet on the stage, and were attacked before they could get a firm footing. No wonder they wavered and could not defend themselves. Xiuwen didn't give them a chance. Quick as a flash his fists flew around so that those three felt like they were under a heavy rain of fists. They tried to retaliate, but ended up hitting each other. The audience was surprised and impressed. "Guo Da Xia is really a hero without peer," they thought, "his disciple is so fierce."

Those three counter-attacked again and again, but still could not get out from under Wu Xiuwen's fists.

Wanyan Ping saw her husband had the upper hand and could not help but feel so proud.

"Of course those three dummies are not Brother Xiuwen's match," said Guo Fu. "Why did he go on stage and waste his energy for nothing? When someone with a really high skill shows up later, wouldn't it be difficult for him to beat them?"

Wanyan Ping was gentle by nature; she only smiled and ignored Guo Fu. Yelu Yan, on the other hand, was more straightforward. She was the sister of Yelu Qi, thus the sister-in-law of Guo Fu. Hearing Guo Fu's remark -she understood very well what it meant- she could not hold her peace any longer. "This situation actually fits you very well," she snickered. "Young Wu beats several people, and when somebody beats him, Dunru will go next and beat some more. And finally my brother will go and beat the rest of the competitors. Then Sister-in-law can be Mrs. Clan Chief with little effort."

Guo Fu blushed. "There are so many valiant people here, and they all want to be Clan Chief," she said with embarrassment in her voice, "how could you say 'with little effort?'"

"Actually, my brother does not even have to go on stage," Yelu Yan continued.

"Why so?" Guo Fu was curious.

"Didn't you hear Elder Liang?" her sister-in-law asked. "When the Beggar Clan Mount Jun Summit was held, Mistress was only in her teens. Wielding only a bamboo stick she subdued everybody and became the Clan leader. They say 'the apple fell not far from the tree'; Sister-in-law, I think you'd better go on stage. I believe you have a better chance than my brother to be the Beggar Clan Chief."

"Such a sharp tongue! You dare to mock me! Good!" Guo Fu shouted, attacking her sister-in-law's armpit. Yelu Yan leaped backward. "Clan Chief! Help!" she called out, laughing hard. "Mrs. Clan Chief wants to kill me!"

By this time Guo Fu, Xiuwen and Dunru were already over thirty years of age, and Yelu Yan and Wanyan Ping had children. But they still liked to fool around like kids.

In the meantime, Huang Rong – who sat next to Guo Jing, was always alert. She kept looking around the field, to see if any strangers had sneaked in. She had instructed several Beggar Clan members to guard the area and report to her immediately if they saw anything out of ordinary. She was still worried that Shenyang Shitay, Han Wugou, Zhang Yimang and the others would show up and create a disruption. But till the end of eighth hour entering the ninth hour [i.e. around 3-4 o'clock in the afternoon] everything was still under control.

“Why would those weirdoes gather in Xiangyang?” she asked herself. “Something should have been happening by now. It’s beyond me that they would come over just to wish Xiang’er a happy birthday.” She lowered her head and sighed. Her intelligence could not penetrate this mystery.

Another time she lifted her head and watched the match on the stage. Xiuwen had defeated two competitors, and looked like the third would not hold him much longer. “Today the valiant people of the world are competing for the Clan Chief position,” she thought, “I wonder who will hold this prestigious position?”

Of course the same question had been hovering in everybody’s mind.

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Except ... in the Chinese peony pavilion [shao yao ting] behind the Guo’s Family Mansion, there was somebody who did not show the slightest interest in what was happening on the field. She sat alone daydreaming, with many questions in her heart. “That day I gave him one golden needle and specifically asked him to see me today. Today is my sixteenth birthday. That day, he gave me his promise. Why doesn’t he show up?”

She was sitting on a porch, leaning against a doorpost. The sun slowly crept to the west. “It’s already afternoon. Even if he comes, we will meet for only half a day at most,” she said softly to herself.

She looked at the flowerbeds, while her little fingers held the last golden needle. She sighed and with an almost inaudible voice said again, “I can ask him one last favor ... ah...! I think he has already forgotten me. He doesn’t even remember his promise for today. What other favor I could ask?” Another moment later she had another thought, “It’s impossible. He

wouldn't forget his promise. He is a chivalrous hero (Da Xia) of the world, and he must always keep his word. Just wait ... he'll be here." With this thought, her face turned pink and the fingers that hold the golden needle were shaking a little bit.

She sighed again. One thought kept coming back. "Even though he is a chivalrous hero, and he always keeps his word, I am only a young girl," she thought, heart beating faster. "If he made a promise to Father, he would not fail to keep his word. But to me, I am only the 'Young Eastern Heretic' (Xiao Dong Xia) Guo Xiang. What am I worth in his eyes? Only a young girl! It's very possible that when he remembered his promise, he would only laugh and said: Ah! Don't bother!"

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While Guo Xiang was busy thinking in the Chinese peony pavilion, Huang Rong, on the field, could not keep her second daughter off her mind. "According to Brother Jing, there were only two persons in this whole wide world who had the internal energy high enough to help Fu'er and Xiang'er back at the Yang Tai Fu temple," she thought. "If not the Benevolent Master Hong Qigong, then it must be Brother Jing himself. The fact is, the Benevolent Master had passed away, and Brother Jing didn't do it. Who could it be that invited those strange characters to wish Xiang'er a happy birthday? Old Urchin Zhou Botong loves to fool around, but even he could not make this meticulous plan. Reverend Yideng? Not likely; he is a monk. Western Poison Ouyang Feng and Monk Ci'en Qiu Qianren both have passed away. Could it be ... Father?"

Huang Rong had not seen her father for more than ten years. Huang Yaoshi was like a wandering cloud or a wild crane, roaming Jianghu; nobody knew his whereabouts. She thought the peculiarity of this mystery went well with her father's

character. For a long time the name, Huang Yaoshi, had been well known in the Jianghu world, and people called him the 'Eastern Heretic'. His peculiar way of thinking went very well with those weird people. So if the 'Old Heretic Huang' asked, they would certainly oblige.

Having this thought, Huang Rong's heart beat faster and her countenance brightened. True, it was not appropriate for a grandfather to make jokes with his granddaughter. But Huang Yaoshi did not follow 'appropriateness', the custom and regulations of the day. He was like a heavenly dragon that was out of this world. Huang Rong was his daughter, but even she could not predict what he would do. Could it be that this grandfather had invited guests to congratulate his granddaughter? She held this train of thought and asked Guo Fu. "When she returned from those two days of being missing at Fenglingdu, did she mention Grandfather's name?"

"No. Sister has never even seen Grandfather."

"Think hard," urged her mother. "She left Fenglingdu and went with Xishan Ghosts, did your sister ever mention anybody else?"

"No," she answered, shaking her head.

Of course Guo Fu knew that her sister went to see Yang Guo. It was all right with her mother, but if her father ever heard that name, he would turn sour and wouldn't talk to her for two or three days. Therefore, while Guo Xiang herself didn't mention Yang Guo, Guo Fu certainly was not willing to look for trouble.

Huang Rong saw her daughter's countenance change and she knew Guo Fu was hiding something from her. "This is not a simple matter," she said. "If you know anything, you'd better tell me."

Guo Fu did not dare to hold back anymore. "That day we heard people were talking about the Eagle Hero, which is Yang ... Yang ... Yang Guo," she said. "After listening to their stories, Sister insisted she wanted to see him."

Huang Rong was startled. "Did Xiang'er meet him?" she asked.

"Of course not," came the answer. "If she did, she wouldn't stop bragging about it."

"Guo'er ... Guo'er ..." mumbled Huang Rong softly. "Is it him?" She turned to her daughter and continued, "Fu'er, what do you think? Was it him who killed Nimoxing at the Yang Tai Fu Temple?"

"How could it be him?" Guo Fu answered, "How could Yang ... Yang Da Ge [big brother Yang] have this kind of martial art?"

"What did you and your sister talk about in the Yang Tai Fu Temple? Tell me all, don't skip anything," Huang Rong said.

"It was nothing important," Guo Fu said, "Mei zi [little sister] loves to bicker with me." And then she narrated how her little sister didn't want to attend the Heroes Summit, didn't want to see the Beggar Clan Chief election, and how she told her that a very handsome hero would visit her on her birthday. Finally, she laughed and said, "Her friends did indeed come to visit. But they are monks, priestesses, grandpas and grandmas. Where is that handsome hero?"

Now Huang Rong was convinced that the handsome hero could not be anybody else but Yang Guo. She thought Guo Xiang and Yang Guo had made an appointment to meet at the Yang Tai Fu Temple, but that plan was foiled by Guo Fu. Then, to vent his anger Yang Guo had invited several Jianghu characters to wish Guo Xiang a happy birthday. "But ... why would he spend so much time and energy just for a kid like

Xiang'er?" she asked herself. Suddenly she remembered Guo Xiang's extraordinary behavior. She remembered how Guo Xiang liked to daydream, talked to herself, and her countenance turned pink for no reason. Huang Rong shuddered involuntarily. Her heart pounding, she thought, "We are doomed! Yang Guo hates me because I caused his father's death; he hates Fu'er who chopped off his arm, he hates Fu'er even more for striking Xiao Longnu with a poison needle. Xiao Longnu promised to meet him sixteen years later, and now it is sixteen years later. Aiyo! Yang Guo is coming to exact his revenge."

Once the thought 'Yang Guo is coming to exact his revenge' came into her mind, cold sweat trickled down her spine. She knew Yang Guo's behavior was completely unpredictable; his love for Xiao Longnu was very deep. If he had waited sorrowfully for sixteen years and Xiao Longnu did not show up, he might unleash his anger and frustrations at the Guo family. After sixteen years it would not be enough just to kill Guo Fu; he must have another evil scheme in his mind. "Could it be that Guo Xiang was his target? Making her fall in love with him, then crushing her heart so she would suffer for the rest of her life? Well, with Yang Guo's personality, that was very possible." Once she finished her train of thought, she came to a conclusion: Yang Guo killed Nimoxing to save Guo Xiang's life, then he sent several strange characters to wish her a happy birthday; his intention was to win her heart.

"But ... something is not right!" her brain clicked again. "Today is Xiang'er's sixteenth birthday. It was several months after Xiang'er was born that he parted with Xiao Longnu in the Passionless Valley. If he wanted to exact revenge, he would've waited for a full sixteen years, just like his wife had promised him ... Although this sixteen-year appointment is questionable, that message was obviously her own handwriting. Who can tell if the two of them, husband and wife, will or will not see each other again? But my father ...

and the 'Divine Nun of the South Sea' [Nan Hai Shen Ni] ...” The longer she thought, the more muddled her mind became. “Ah! Whatever happens, Xiang’er should not be allowed to see him,” she thought. “Xiang’er is just a child, she is too naïve for man’s wickedness.”

Suddenly an “Aiyo!” was heard from the stage. Huang Rong turned her gaze there and she saw Xiuwen’s palm strength had sent a fat monk down from the stage. She approached her husband and whispered, “You wait here. I am going to see Xiang’er.”

“Isn’t Xiang’er here?” asked her husband.

“I will bring her here,” she answered. “That child is a little weird.”

Guo Jing looked at his wife with smile on his face. Wasn’t his wife also a weird child? He remembered the very first time they met, when Huang Rong was dressed like a beggar boy.

Seeing his smile, Huang Rong also smiled, and briskly walked back to her mansion. As upset as she was, seeing her husband’s smile and his broad shoulders – like he was strong enough to carry the burden of the whole world, Huang Rong suddenly felt better.

Arriving at Guo Xiang’s room, she did not find her daughter there; and was told by a maid that the Second Miss went out to the flower garden and said that she was not to be disturbed.

Huang Rong was shocked. “Xiang’er did not want to see the election, I am sure she’s made another appointment with Yang Guo,” she thought. She then turned her steps toward her own room, to get her own steel needle projectiles, slipped a dagger on her waist, and fetched her short stick. Only then did she go to the flower garden. She understood very well

that Yang Guo now wouldn't be the same as the Yang Guo of the past. He was already a formidable opponent then and she would not dare to be careless. She did not take the brick-covered path, but walked stealthily around the decorative stones and rocks scattered throughout the garden. Nearing the pavilion she could hear her daughter's sigh.

She went closer still and hid herself behind a big rock. A moment later she heard her daughter's voice, "Why isn't he here yet?"

Huang Rong was relieved. "Turns out he is not here yet. I can still prevent them from meeting," she thought.

"Every birthday Mother always tell me to make three wishes," she heard Guo Xiang was talking to herself. "Good thing there is nobody around; I can talk to Heaven."

Huang Rong was about to step out, but hearing her last sentence she stayed in her hiding place. "Even though I'm her mother, I can't predict what is in her heart," she thought, "let me hear what she has to say."

A moment later Guo Xiang said, "God of Heaven, my first wish is that Father and Mother will be successful in leading the army and the multitude of valiant people to defeat the Mongolian invaders, so that the people of Xiangyang will live in peace and prosperity."

Huang Rong exhaled softly. "Even though I call her weird, this child has a benevolent heart," she praised her in her heart.

"My second wish is that Father and Mother are granted good health and longevity, that they may live to a hundred years," the young miss continued. "I wish that everything will happen just like they have wanted."

Guo Xiang was born to her parents when they were facing a great danger. Huang Rong's heart pounded every time she recalled that incident. Thus, without her realizing it, her love toward Guo Xiang was not as strong as toward Guo Fu. But now, hearing the little girl's wish, she was very touched and tears welled up in her eyes.

The young miss paused a moment before she continued, "My third wish is for the Eagle Hero Yang Guo ..."

Huang Rong was startled. She had thought that the third wish must've had something to do with Yang Guo, but hearing his name, she was still startled. "... that he might meet his wife, Xiao Longnu, a lot sooner, and let them live happily forever," finished Guo Xiang.

This third wish floored Huang Rong. She originally thought Yang Guo had deceived her daughter with all kind of lies. Who would have known that her daughter knew everything about his marriage to Xiao Longnu and what had happened to them afterward. But a moment later another thought entered her mind and she became worried again. "Damn it, Yang Guo is so shrewd!" she moaned. "By showing her that he had never forgotten his wife, he earned Xiang'er's highest respect. Right! If after meeting me Brother Jing had ignored Princess Hua Zheng, I would've looked down on him."

And so, because Huang Rong regarded this matter from all possible directions; she became fearful of Yang Guo molesting her daughter. She started to breathe heavily; her own mind had driven her to distraction.

Suddenly an unusual noise was heard above the wall, followed by someone jumping down to the ground. His body was short and small, but his head was big. His figure, as well as his face looked ridiculously strange.

But Guo Xiang leaped with joy upon seeing this dwarf. "Uncle Big Head Ghost!" she greeted him with delight, "Is ... is he coming?"

That man indeed was the Big Head Ghost. He walked to the pavilion and made obeisance to Guo Xiang. "Aiyo!" cried the young Miss, "Uncle Big Head Ghost, don't you honor me like that."

"Miss, don't call me 'Uncle Big Head Ghost'," he said, "just call me 'Big Head Ghost'. The Eagle Hero has instructed me to let Miss know ..."

"He isn't able to come?" cut in Guo Xiang, desperation in her voice, while tears welled up in her eyes, "He gave me his promise ..."

"No, not at all," answered Big Head Ghost, repeatedly shaking his big head.

"Why not?" asked Guo Xiang. "Didn't you know, he did give his promise to me?" Tears almost flowed down her cheeks.

"Miss, I did not say that the Eagle Hero did not give you his promise, or that he is not able to come," explained the Ghost.

"Just look at you," Guo Xiang sulked, "You are talking gibberish, not this, not that ..."

The Big Head Ghost showed a faint smile, "The Eagle Hero said that since he had to prepare three gifts for your birthday, he will be a little bit late."

Guo Xiang was pouting, "Too many people bringing me birthday gifts; I have everything already. Please tell Big Brother not to bother me with any other gifts."

The Big Head Ghost shook his head. "Among those three gifts, the first one is ready; while the second one has to be

prepared by him personally, with some of our friends. It is very possible that it is ready as we speak.”

Guo Xiang sighed. “Actually, I prefer not to receive any gifts, as long as he comes quickly,” she said softly.

“About the third gift, the Eagle Hero said that Miss needs to go to the field where the election is being held. You need to receive the gift straight from his hand,” the Big Head Ghost continued. “Now that it’s almost that time, I think you’d better go.”

Guo Xiang sighed again, and then laughing she said, “I have told Big Sister I don’t want to see the Chief’s Election. But since Big Brother says to go, I have no choice. Very well, let’s go together.”

The Big Head Ghost nodded his big head and then he whistled. Suddenly a dark shadow jumped over the wall from outside, it was none other than the Divine Eagle itself. As soon as Guo Xiang saw it, she immediately went over and tried to hug its neck like they were a pair of long-lost friends. But the Eagle moved back two steps and stood straight arrogantly, turning its head and only looking at Guo Xiang with the corner of its eyes. The little Miss was amused, she laughed, “Brother Eagle is so proud. You are ignoring me, but I want to hug you.” She jumped forward and tried to hug it again. This time the Eagle did not avoid her and let its neck be hugged tightly; but its attitude was like a father’s resignation over a mischievous loveable daughter. “Brother Eagle,” Guo Xiang said, “Let us go together. I will give you some delicious food. Do you like to drink wine?”

The Big Head Ghost clapped his hands. “Good! The Divine Eagle loves to drink wine,” he said.

And so two people and one Eagle ran toward the field. Entering the area the gathered heroes expressed their

admiration by clucking their tongues at seeing the eagle's huge body and its strange appearance.

Guo Xiang invited the Big Head Ghost and the Eagle to sit on the ground not too far from the stage. The Beggar Clan disciples who acted as the hosts immediately came and asked the Big Head Ghost's name.

"I don't have a name and I know nothing! Miss Guo brought me here, I follow her!" he answered coldly.

Huang Rong followed not too far behind, she thought, "Yang Guo is going to appear on the field; that means he's made a thorough plan; we might have a big fight later."

At that time both Wu brothers, Dunru and Xiuwen, had been beaten. Zhu Ziliu's martial nephew, as well as three of the Fisherman's [Si Shui Yu Yin's] disciples, four eighth grade and six seventh grade Beggar Clan's disciples, had gone on stage, to defeat and be defeated by their opponents. Right now Yelu Qi was on the stage. He had defeated three opponents, using Zhou Botong's 72-stance "Vacant Fist" technique, and now was fighting a forty something year old man.

This man's name was Lan Tianhe, a Miao [an ethnic group] from Guizhou. When he was young, Tianhe went gathering herbs in the mountainous area of Sichuan province. There he slipped and fell down a ravine, and was rescued by a skilled martial artist. He then learned from his rescuer the external type of martial arts [wai-gong, as opposed to nei-gong]; as a result, his fists created a loud noise. Yelu Qi's kungfu on the other hand did not create any noise at all; his hands and feet floating silently with fierce attacks interspersed in between. Their match was very impressive.

The opponents had exchanged stances for quite some time. The several hundred spectators who wanted to go on the

stage were ashamed by their own inferiority and thought, "Luckily I wasn't rash enough to go on stage; otherwise I am just going to make a scene with my inadequacy. Even if I trained hard for ten more years I won't necessarily be able to defeat either of these two combatants."

Lan Tianhe's strong and forceful attacks required a lot of energy; he felt he was getting tired. Yelu Qi, on the other hand, kept his attacks steady, not getting too fierce, but also not slacking off. He knew there were more tough contenders out there. He wanted to conserve his energy.

After fighting for quite some time Lan Tianhe became impatient; he had roamed the southwest area for over twenty years and nobody was able to withstand more than thirty stances of his attacks. Unexpectedly that day, in front of thousands of heroes, he met his match. Gradually he increased his strength and very soon the two had exchanged twenty more stances.

Lan Tianhe saw an opening in his opponent's defense, "Got you!" he shouted. He used one of his trick stances, 'Nine Demons Seize a Star' [jiu gui zhai xing]. His fist went straight toward Yelu Qi's chest.

Yelu Qi's right palm made a sweeping motion, his hands intersecting, and parried the opponent's fist. They stood motionless for a few seconds. The fight turned into an inner strength contest. Then Lan Tianhe's expression changed; he staggered backward then cupped his fists to his opponent and said, "I concede!" He proceeded to the edge of the stage and loudly said, "Mr. Yelu has a benevolent heart; he didn't want to take my life, for which I am very grateful!" He took a deep breath, shook his head and leaped down from the stage.

Yelu Qi also cupped his hands and said, "I have the same admiration for Lan Xiong [Brother Lan]."

When Lan Tianhe's fist met with Yelu Qi's palm, immediately he sent his inner strength out he felt like his force was hitting water; it felt empty yet not empty, it felt solid yet not solid; and he felt his energy being sucked in. Then he felt his opponent's force entering his hand, flowing to his chest through his arm, and attacking his 'dan tian' like bowls of boiling water. Stunned and feeling like he was going to explode, he nervously tried to pull his fist back, but it was stuck as though glued to his opponent's palm, even after he pulled it back about half a foot. He then remembered his master's instructions that with his "Wind and Thunder" technique he could roam Jianghu, but he had to be very careful fighting against a nei-gong martial artist; as soon as the opponent's energy entered his 'dan tian' he would die violently. As soon as this thought entered his mind he closed his eyes, ready to die. But suddenly his fist was free; the heat in his 'dan tian' was also slowly dispersed. He circulated his 'qi' and did not feel any injury within; then he knew his opponent had shown mercy and spared his life. He felt ashamed and willingly admitted defeat to the public.

When the two fought the long fight on stage everybody could see Lan Tianhe's overwhelming palm strength; it was both swift and fierce. But Yelu Qi unexpectedly defeated him with an invisible force. Nobody knew what exactly happened, but after his victory nobody dared to challenge him on stage.

As Guo Jing and Huang Rong's son-in-law, Yelu Qi had close ties with the Beggar Clan. The four elders and twelve eighth grade disciples all agreed to elect him as the Clan Chief. Yelu Qi was Zhou Botong's disciple, hence all Quanzhen disciples present were his juniors. Because other people regarded Guo Jing, husband and wife, and the Quanzhen Sect with respect, nobody was really keen on challenging him. Several other people who did not realize their own lower skills had come onstage but he defeated them one by one.

Seeing her husband had gone this far, Guo Fu's delight was unspeakable. But then she saw the Eagle and the dwarf with a big head she met at Fenglingdu were sitting next to Guo Xiang; she was startled. When Guo Xiang made her entrance to the field along with the Big Head Ghost and the eagle Yelu Qi's fight with Lan Tianhe was very intense so that Guo Fu's attention was focused on the stage. Although the eagle was impressive, she completely missed their entrance.

Now that a strong opponent had been defeated she wondered, when did her little sister tell her about coming to the field? She was secretly startled, "Not good! Yang Guo's title is Divine Eagle Big Hero [shen diao da xia]; could it be that this big and ugly bird is his Divine Eagle [shen diao]? The bird is here, chances are that Yang Guo is close by. He is going to be the Clan Chief ... He is going to be the Clan Chief ...!"

From a mood of delight, this young mistress became upset. She recalled the incident when Yang Guo bent her sword just using his empty sleeve. She thought, "Brother Qi is good, but he is no match for this one-armed freak. It looks like he is my Black Star (opposing opposite) always appearing at critical moments like this ...!" She looked around in all directions, but not even his shadow could be seen.

The sky was getting darker; Yelu Qi had defeated seven opponents. After waiting for quite some time and since no one appeared to challenge, Elder Liang went up and announced loud and clear, "Master Yelu is intelligent and chivalrous. We all admire him; the whole Beggar Clan supports his election to the Clan Chief position ..."

Immediately the beggars around the stage applauded and cheered.

"I wonder if there is another valiant hero to challenge him?" Elder Liang continued. Three times he repeated himself, but

got no takers.

Guo Fu was elated. She thought, “Yang Guo is not coming, he’s lost his chance. If he shows up, even by a moment after Brother Qi is inaugurated as the Clan Chief, he would be too late to mess things up.”

The thought had not even left her mind when suddenly they heard two horses galloping fast approaching the field. It seemed like it was a very urgent matter.

“Ah! He is coming after all!” Guo Fu was shocked.

Two horses dashed onto the field and their riders were two gray-robed spies Guo Jing had sent to scout the enemy’s movements. Even though Guo Jing was watching the election contest, his heart was never far from thinking about military matters. As soon as he saw these riders he thought, “Ah! They are coming after all!”

Guo Jing and Guo Fu, father and daughter thought the same ‘coming after all’ but the daughter meant Yang Guo, while her father meant the Mongolian troops, their enemy.

The two riders stopped their horses several ‘zhangs’ [several meters] from the stage, and immediately paid respects to Guo Jing.

Without waiting for them to open their mouths, Guo Jing and Huang Rong looked at their faces, trying to guess what the news would be; but they did not see worried faces. They looked so calm, more on the happy side, like they were bearing unexpectedly good news.

“Please be informed Hero Guo,” said one of them, “the Mongolian troops’ left wing has arrived at Xinye. They are one thousand men strong.”

Guo Jing was shocked, secretly thought, "They are that quick!"

"Also the right wing has arrived at Dengzhou, another one thousand men strong," the second spy reported.

Guo Jing uttered a 'Hmm' and silently thought, "The enemy from the north divided their troops into two flanks, and they moved very fast. Truly a sharp strategy." Both Xinye and Dengzhou were only 100 li (50km / 31 miles) or so from Xiangyang. From those cities to Xiangyang, the terrain was flat, with no rivers or mountains on the way. They could reach Xiangyang in just one day.

"Something has happened there. Something strange but pleasant to us," continued the second spy. "The troops at Dengzhou, all one thousand of them, have been killed, including all the officers ..."

"Is that so?" Guo Jing was more amazed.

"That was what I witnessed," the first spy confirmed. "The one thousand strong troops at Xinye have become ghosts, everybody died. The most peculiar thing was they all lost their left ears!"

"The same thing happened at Dengzhou," added the second spy, "they also lost their left ears."

Guo Jing exchanged a look with his wife. They were both surprised and pleased. The enemy was tens of thousands strong, two thousand dead would not make a dent. But the way they died could crush their spirit. Only which troops or who had destroyed the enemy's two flanking troops?

"What about the defense troops at Xinye and Dengzhou?" Guo Jing asked.

“They were still inside their cities,” came the answer, “We don’t think they were even aware that the enemy’s troops were decimated outside their cities.”

“Now go and give the report to General Lu,” commanded Huang Rong, “I am sure he will be pleased and will give you some reward.”

The two spies nodded and happily retreated.

Huang Rong immediately went on stage and made the announcement, which was received with loud cheering and applause by their entire army.

“The Beggar Clan has just elected a new chief, this is a very pleasing news,” said Huang Rong, “but this news is even more pleasing! Elder Liang, please prepare a feast, we will make a celebration!”

A feast had indeed been prepared; therefore, they were able to move swiftly. Everybody was high in spirits, even Dunru and the others who were defeated during their matches. The Beggar Clan party did not allow tables and chairs, so they just sat on bamboo mats laid out scattered across the field. Although humble, the food and wine were sumptuous.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong were repeatedly congratulated. People thought it was their doing. No matter how they denied it, nobody believed them.

“Brother Jing, this is so strange,” said Huang Rong to her husband, “we’ll just ignore them and see what happens.”

Madam Guo then sent eight smart beggars to run to Xinye and Dengzhou to investigate further.

In the meantime, Guo Xiang was still sitting with the Big Head Ghost and the eagle. Nobody dared to come close to them.

"I wonder why Big Brother has not come yet?" Guo Xiang asked.

"He said he will come, he'll come," answered the Big Head Ghost. He was just finishing speaking when he suddenly said, "There! Did you hear that? What's that noise?"

Guo Xiang strained her ears. From a distance she could hear animal noises, loud roars of lions and tigers, loud cries of big monkeys, and the heavy footsteps of elephants.

"The Shi Brothers are here!" Guo Xiang was delighted.

Not too long afterwards everybody could see the beasts. They were shocked and unsheathed their weapons. Panicked voices were heard everywhere, "Where did they come from? Ah! Lions! Tigers! Watch out! Wolves! Leopards...!"

Guo Jing stayed calm. "Go to the city and summon two thousand archers!" he commanded Xiuwen.

"Yes," Xiuwen complied and was just about to move when suddenly a loud voice was heard, "The Shi Brothers from the Beastly Mountain Village are here to carry out the Eagle Hero's instructions to wish Miss Guo Xiang a very happy birthday!"

That voice did not come out of one, but from five mouths. The Shi brothers did not have a high level of internal energy, but by combining their voices, they could be heard from afar.

Even though he heard them; Huang Rong still thought that being prepared wouldn't hurt anything. She signaled Xiuwen to proceed. The Shi Brothers' intent was not yet clear.

Xiuwen worked fast. In no time he arranged the archers to defend the field in a horseshoe formation. These archers were under Guo Jing's coaching. As we remember, Guo Jing himself was a Jebek (master archer – see LOCH). This was also one

reason why Xiangyang could defend itself from the Mongolian troops for dozens of years. The archers were not inferior to the Mongolian archers who were well known throughout the world.

As soon as the archers were in formation, a big man appeared. He wore a tiger fur robe, and was accompanied by a hundred large tigers. It was the White Forehead Mountain Lord Shi Bowei. His tigers immediately sat around him in an orderly fashion.

Following him were Caring Eyesight Sage Shi Zhongmeng with his hundred leopards, Golden Claw Lion King Shi Shugang with his hundred male lions, Immortal of Giant Strength Shi Jiqiang with his hundred big elephants, and Eight Handed Monkey Immortal Shi Mengjie with his hundred big monkeys. These five groups of animals then sat around their masters in neat formations. As well-trained as they were, the animals could not be kept quiet. They kept making loud and frightening noises, which made the hearts of the people of Xiangyang tremble.

Each one of the Shi Brothers brought a leather pouch. They approached Guo Xiang and bowed, "We wish you a very happy birthday, good health and longevity!"

Guo Xiang stood up and reciprocated, "Thank you, Shi Uncles! Third Uncle Shi, is your injury healed? Fifth Uncle Shi, how about the sword wound on your chest?"

Shi Shugang and Shi Mengjie were touched, "Many thanks Miss for showing your concern, we are healed."

Shi Bowei pointed to the five pouches. "These are the first presents from the Eagle Hero to Miss Guo," he said.

"I really cannot accept it!" said Guo Xiang, giggling. "What are those? Oh, I know! Yours must be a tiger cub, and his is a

leopard cub! Am I right? That would be fun!”

“No!” Shi Bowei smiled, “These are the fruits of the great effort of seven hundred Jianghu friends under the leadership of the Eagle Hero!” Then he opened his pouch.

Guo Xiang stretched her neck to see the content, she was startled, “Ears! Human ears...!”

“That’s right!” answered Shi Bowei, “These five pouches contain a total of two thousand Mongolian soldiers’ ears!”

Guo Xiang was dumbfounded, “This many ears, I ... What should I do with all these ears?” she asked.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong had heard everything; they stood up and came near Shi Bowei to see the ears. There in front of them was the proof of what their spies had told them. They were surprised and delighted at the same time.

“Brother Shi,” Huang Rong addressed Shi Bowei, “It turns out the Mongolian troops at Xinye and Dengzhou were destroyed by hero ... Eagle Hero’s troop. Is that right?”

Before answering the Shi Brothers quickly knelt down and paid their respects to Guo Jing and Huang Rong, which Guo Jing and Huang Rong quickly reciprocated. Shi Bowei explained, “The Eagle Hero said that Miss Guo Xiang is in Xiangyang, and today is her sixteenth birthday. The Mongolian barbarians are going to attack, endangering the Second Miss Guo; therefore, they have to be killed. He regrets the fact that the enemy numbers are so great that we cannot destroy them all. However, he has led a number of valiant people to destroy two thousand members of their front line companies.”

“Where is the Eagle Hero at this moment?” asked Guo Jing. “I want to see him and convey the gratitude of the entire Xiangyang population.”

Guo Jing had been so busy defending Xiangyang and training his troops for dozens of years that he had not roamed Jianghu. Therefore, he was not aware that the Eagle Hero was none other than his Yang Guo.

“We apologize on his behalf,” said Shi Bowei, “because the Eagle Hero has been busy preparing some presents for Miss Guo these past few days. He did not have a chance to pay a visit to Great Hero Guo and Madame.”

Shi Bowei had just finished when a whistle was heard from a distance; then a voice was heard, “The Xishan Ghosts have received the Eagle Hero’s instructions to wish Miss Guo a happy birthday, and to deliver this present ...!”

That voice was not loud, but sharp. It sounded like the voice came and went, but every word was clear.

“Guo Jing waits.” Guo Jing quickly answered. He knew that since the first present was so valuable, he did not dare to be inattentive. He used his internal energy, so his voice traveled far. He stood erect alongside his wife and waited.

“Can you guess who this Eagle Hero is?” Huang Rong whispered.

“I don’t know,” answered her husband.

“It’s Yang Guo!”

Guo Jing looked up in surprise; but in the end he was ecstatic. “Wonderful! Just wonderful!” he exclaimed. “He has rendered his country a great service; this is the merit of our great Song Dynasty.”

“Can you guess what this second present will be?” Huang Rong asked again.

Her husband only smiled. "Guo'er is so smart; you are the only one who is his match." he answered, "Only you could guess."

"But this time I really don't have any idea," said Huang Rong, shaking her head, but in her heart she said, "Yang Guo has done a great service to Xiangyang, but he keeps saying that all are for Xiang'er; his hatred toward us, husband and wife, and Fu'er, has not diminished."

In a moment the Long Beard Ghost appeared on the field, leading the other eight ghosts. They immediately paid their respect to Guo Jing and his wife. Only then did they approach Guo Xiang and said, "Wishing you health and unbounded happiness! The Eagle Hero instructed us to deliver the second present!"

"Thank you, thank you!" said Guo Xiang. She saw the Xishan Ghosts all carried boxes, big boxes and small boxes.

Guo Jing was afraid the contents were some kind of ears or noses or other human parts, so quickly he said, "If the contents are not good to behold, I ask you not to open them."

The Big Head Ghost laughed. "These are very good things to behold!" he said. Fan Yiweng then opened the lid and picked up what looked like a fireworks rocket. He lit that thing and it shot up, and exploded high in the air and amidst the colorful rain of light appeared a letter 'Gong' [respectful].

Guo Xiang was so happy that she jumped around and clapped her hands while saying: "Good...Very good!"

The Hangman Ghost [Diao Si Gui] also ignited a rocket and that made the letter 'zhu' [best wishes]. Then, one by one, the rest of the ghosts ignited their rockets, forming a string of characters which read, 'gong zhu guo er gu niang duo fu duo shou' [respectfully wishing the Second Miss Guo prosperity

and longevity]; ten big characters. Each character had its own color and they stayed afloat for quite some time. The gathered heroes clapped and cheered. The fireworks were made by Hankou's well known Huang Yipao, an unrivalled fireworks artist.

Guo Jing smiled, he was also very happy. He thought, "My daughter loves fireworks so much. Good thing Yang Guo could find a very skilled artist to make them."

The fireworks were just about to disperse when a few li to the north another firework was shot, then another one much further to the north.

"These fireworks work like a beacon," Huang Rong thought, "this way somebody could deliver a message a few hundred li in just a short moment. I wonder what Yang Guo prepared for the second present. I doubt it is just fireworks to make Xiang'er happy."

Madam Guo immediately instructed the Beggar Clan to prepare some additional bamboo mats for the Shi Brothers and the Xishan Ghosts.

While the feast was still underway, thunderous noises came from way up north, one explosion after another. The noise was muffled because it was so far away.

Upon hearing that noise, the Shi Brothers and the Xishan Ghosts jumped up and down, ecstatically exclaimed, "Success...Success!" Nobody in Xiangyang knew what they were exclaiming about.

The Big Head Ghost pointed to the north and kept shouting, "Wonderful! Wonderful!"

Because it was already dark, everybody could see the light of fires showing in the north.

"The city of Nanyang is on fire!" Huang Rong suddenly exclaimed. Guo Jing realized what had happened, he slapped his thigh, "That's right! It is Nanyang!"

"I beg your explanation," said Huang Rong to Fan Yiweng.

"That is the second present from the Eagle Hero to Miss Guo;" came the answer. "We set the two-hundred-thousand strong Mongolian army's logistics on fire."

Huang Rong had guessed correctly, but still they were surprised and ecstatic. In their effort to destroy Xiangyang, the Mongolians had built the city of Nanyang as its logistics center. They had built barns and grown fields of grass for several years. Tons of rice, wheat, water and hay were gathered from all over the Mongolian territories and sent to Nanyang. There was a saying, 'A great troop movement is always preceded by provisions and grass.' Rice and wheat were the soldiers' food while grass was for the horses. The Mongolians rely heavily on their cavalry; therefore, food and hay were indispensable to the army's movements. Guo Jing had tried on several occasions to send specially trained teams to destroy it, but they never succeeded in doing so, since the city was heavily guarded. Unexpectedly Yang Guo had succeeded in putting that city to the flame!

Guo Jing gazed to the north looking at the fire, anxiety began creeping into his heart, "Will they be able to retreat without any harm? Shall we join them and render any help we can?" Guo Jing asked Fan Yiweng.

"Hero Guo did not ask about the results, but asked about the safety of the people, he has such a benevolent heart," thought Yiweng. Then he explained, "Thank you for Hero's concern. Everything was carefully planned by the Eagle Hero. The team consists of Shengyin Shitai, Ren Chuzi, Zhang Yimang, Bai Caoxian and the others; more than 300 people

total. Even though the Mongolian troop is strong, there is no way they can harm us.”

Like he was just waking up from a deep sleep, Guo Jing said to Huang Rong, “You heard that? Guo’er has gathered so many valiant people to render this great service. If not for these highly skilled heroes, how could two thousand soldiers be decimated in such a short period of time?”

Fan Yiweng explained further, “Our spies reported that the Mongolians planned to attack Xiangyang with fire power; they have approximately ten thousand ‘jin’s [a ‘jin’ is approximately 0.5kg or 1lb] of gunpowder in store in Nanyang. We just followed their lead. We made thorough preparations. As soon as the team saw our fireworks signal, we moved together. According to our plan, first we destroy the explosives, and then set the supply of food and hay on fire. Let the Mongolian army and their horses die of hunger!”

Guo Jing and Huang Rong looked at each other. They were very impressed and alarmed at the same time. They both had followed Genghis Khan’s invasion to the west [for those of you who have not read the novel, it happened toward the last chapters of LOCH See note 1], where the Mongolians destroyed city walls with cannon and explosives. It was like a volcano’s eruption. The reason the Mongolians had not used explosives at Xiangyang before was because of the scarcity of the explosives. But now that the Mongolian Khan, Mengke himself led the attack, they brought the cannons along. Good thing Yang Guo had made this pre-emptive attack; otherwise Xiangyang’s city walls would be destroyed very easily.

Both Guo Jing and Huang Rong were having the same thought, “The decimation of two thousand troops with their left ears missing could crush the enemy’s spirit, but the smashed Nanyang storage base could cause the enemy to

retreat.” Therefore, the Guo couple heartily thanked the Shi Brothers and the Xishan Ghosts.

Shi Bowei and Fan Yiweng both said, “The Xiao ren [little/lowly people] are only following the Eagle Hero’s instructions; our contribution is so minuscule, how can it be worth mentioning?”

During this time they could still hear the sporadic explosions from the north. But since Nanyang was quite a distance away, the noise was muffled. Then, a big and loud explosion was heard. The earth shook.

“There! That must be the main explosives warehouse!” said Fan Yiweng delightedly.

Guo Jing immediately summoned the two Wu Brothers. “Take two thousand men with you, and attack Nanyang,” he gave his command. “But don’t be reckless. If they are still intact, hold off, but if they are disorganized, attack with arrows!” The two brothers complied and immediately executed his command.

These two victories had followed one after another and the people on the field cheered and applauded, offering toasts to each other; everybody praised the Eagle Hero’s unmatched accomplishments. Everyone that is, except Guo Fu ...

She thought her husband was to be the focus of the festivities since he had defeated countless opponents and was elected Chief of the Beggar Clan. Who knew that Yang Guo – without even showing up, had stolen his and her thunder? Of course she was happy with the decimation of two thousand Mongolian front line companies and the annihilation of Nanyang’s provision and explosive storage facilities, but she didn’t get to be the center of attention. Didn’t the Shi Brothers and Fan Yiweng say that the victories were birthday presents for her little sister, Guo Xiang?

"I understand now!" she was fuming, "I chopped off his arm so he bears a grudge against me. So he purposely made me lose face!" From feeling discontent, she became enraged.

Elder Liang shared the same bamboo mat with Yelu Qi and Guo Fu. He saw everybody's countenance was bright, except Guo Fu's. After pondering a while, he figured out the reason. Then he laughed and said, "Ah, this old man is so absent-minded. Because of these joyful victories I have neglected the important business right in front of my eyes!" He jumped on stage and said with a loud voice, "Valiant people! Twice tonight the Mongolian troops have been beaten. We are all very happy; but right here, right now, we have another thing that should double our happiness. Master Yelu had shown his exquisite skills and we all admire him. Master Yelu had been elected our Chief. Now I want to confirm this: is there any of you who still want to challenge our decision? Is there any Beggar Clan disciple who is having a second thought?"

His question was repeated three times. Nobody said anything. Therefore, he continued, "Master Yelu, please come on stage!"

Yelu Qi accepted his bidding. He clasped his hands together in respect, and bowed to everybody. He was just going to open his mouth to make a 'lack of character, lack of ability' modest acceptance speech when suddenly a voice was heard from underneath the stage, "Wait a moment! Xiao Ren [lowly people] wants to ask a thing or two of Master Yelu!"

Yelu Qi looked up in surprise. He heard the voice came from the Beggar group. He said, "I don't dare, Please! Speak up!"

That man stood up, and with a loud voice said, "Master Yelu, your respected father was the Prime Minister of Mongolia, your own brother was a high official in the Mongolian administration. It is true that they both have passed away, but we - the Beggar Clan, have always had enmities with the

Mongolians. With your obscure background, I wonder if it would be proper for you to be our Chief?"

Hearing this, Yelu Qi was irritated. He said, "My benevolent father, the late Yelu Chucai was poisoned by the Queen Mother of Mongolia. My brother, the late Yelu Qin, was executed by the Mongolian Khan! Wouldn't that make me the sworn enemy of the Mongolians?"

"Even so," said the Beggar Clan disciple, "Your father's death is still a mystery. Nobody knows for sure whether he was poisoned. Your brother committed a crime against the monarch, he deserved the capital punishment. You can place your vengeance on hold, that's fine with me; but how about our own resentment ...?"

Listening to someone offending her husband, Guo Fu was enraged. "Who are you?" she asked harshly, "You dare to speak nonsense here! If you have any guts, come up here on stage!"

That beggar laughed mockingly. "Good! Good!" he repeatedly said, "The new Chief hasn't been inaugurated yet, and the Mrs. Chief has shown her fearsomeness!"

As soon as he finished, he leaped to the stage. His movement was so swift that many missed seeing it. They were astonished and wondered in their hearts, "Who is this man? He is highly skilled."

Several thousand pairs of eyes turned their gaze toward this beggar. He was wearing an oversized black raggedy robe. His right hand held an iron stick with a diameter as big as a wine cup. His hair was unkempt, his countenance yellow and dry. He had pockmarks all over his face. He bore five bags on his back; hence he was a fifth grade disciple of the Beggar Clan. There were not many good-looking men among the Beggar Clan disciples, but this man was very, very ugly. As soon as

he appeared, people recognized him as He Shiwo. He was known as a quiet man, who did not like to socialize with his peers and used to follow the crowd without question. He had worked hard, was very loyal to the clan and in ten years he managed to attain the fifth grade. His martial skills were low and he did not demonstrate any other knowledge so that nobody had paid any special attention to him. Everybody thought that fifth grade was too good for him and he would not be able to advance any higher. Who would have thought this ordinary beggar would dare to open his mouth, or even jump on stage to challenge Yelu Qi. "Where did he steal his skill from?" some people thought.

He Shiwo was nobody special, but because of his ugliness, whoever saw him would have a hard time forgetting that face. Thus Yelu Qi also recognized him. He bowed to the beggar and said, "I wonder what instruction Brother He would give to me?"

"Instruct you I do not dare," answered He Shiwo coldly, "But there are two things that I do not understand. Therefore, I came on stage to beg your explanation."

"What are those two things?" asked Yelu Qi.

"First," said He Shiwo, "it is our custom that every Chief of the Beggar Clan will have the 'Dog Beating Stick' as the symbol of his authority. Today Master Yelu has been elected Chief. I wonder where that 'Dog Beating Stick' is? This lowly beggar would like to see it."

His question stirred the hearts of the Beggar Clan disciples, "That was a very good question," they thought.

Yelu Qi answered, "Chief Lu met his death at a criminal's hands; the 'Dog Beating Stick' was also snatched away at that time. This is a disgrace to our Clan. Therefore, it is our collective responsibility to get the Stick back."

“The second thing the Xiao Ren [little/ lowly people] do not understand,” continued He Shiwo, “is about Chief Lu’s death. Have we exacted our revenge yet?”

“Chief Lu was murdered by Hou Dou, everybody knows that,” answered Yelu Qi. “We are all enraged by his atrocity. Unfortunately, we have searched everywhere and so far have not found any trace of that scoundrel Hou Du. This is our collective task, we will keep looking for him, even to the ends of the earth, and exact our revenge on behalf of our beloved Chief Lu!”

He Shiwo coldly laughed and said, “First, the ‘Dog Beating Stick’ is still missing! Second, the assassin of the late Chief Lu has not been found! This business need to be taken care of. Yet someone is actually thinking of becoming the new Chief. Don’t you think that is a rash decision?”

Many people were shocked! Yelu Qi’s face was flushed with anger; he was at a loss for words.

“Brother He, you have spoken reasonably,” Elder Liang intervened. “However, our disciples are numerous and scattered across the country. They cannot be left leaderless. Besides, the task of finding the Stick and the criminal is easier said than done. There must be someone who would spearhead the project. That was the reason why we worked hard to elect the new Chief.”

He Shiwo shook his head. “Elder Liang, I strongly disagree!” he said, “What you said was wrong! You put the cart before the horses!”

Elder Liang was the leading Elder of the Beggar Clan. With the death of Chief Lu, he was the highest-ranking officer in the Clan. The fact that a fifth grade disciple dared to talk like that to him made him furious.

“What’s wrong with what I just said?” he asked.

“In this disciple’s opinion,” He Shiwo said, still very bold, “whoever manages to take the Dog Beating Stick back, and whoever can kill Hou Dou to avenge our Chief, he should be the new Chief! Right now we elected a new Chief only based on his martial arts skills; but what happens if Hou Dou comes here and defeats Yelu Qi; will we elect him our new Chief?”

His words were so reasonable that the beggars were exchanging looks with each other. But Guo Fu was upset and shouted from below the stage, “Rubbish! How could Hou Dou defeat him?”

He Shiwo snickered, he said, “Master Yelu is indeed highly skilled, but that does not mean that he is invincible! This lowly beggar only has five bags on my back, but I doubt if he can defeat me.”

Guo Fu was fuming mad hearing his blatant challenge, she shouted, “Brother Qi! You’d better give this rascal disciple a lesson!”

He Shiwo coldly said, “The internal affair of the Beggar Clan are always taken care of by the Clan Chief and four Elders; Madame Clan Chief has never had any role in the decision making process. Not to mention Master Yelu has not been inaugurated yet; but even if he had, Madame Yelu still has no right to denounce a disciple in public like that. Am I right?”

Guo Fu’s face was turning red. “You ... you ...” she stuttered.

He Shiwo ignored her; he looked at Elder Liang and asked, “Elder Liang, if this disciple can defeat Master Yelu, would I be the new Chief? Or do you think we should wait until after somebody gets the Stick back and kills the criminal?”

Elder Liang was getting angrier hearing him getting bolder than ever. “I don’t care who it is, if he cannot defeat all

contenders, he cannot be the Chief. Later on, if he cannot get the Stick back and cannot kill the enemy, he would regret being the Chief! Master Yelu is no exception. After he is inaugurated as the new Chief, he cannot shirk from these two responsibilities. If he cannot defeat you, Brother He, how could he become the new Chief?"

Hearing this, He Shiwo immediately said, "Elder Liang has spoken reasonably. Now this lowly beggar wants to take a lesson or two from Master Yelu. Only then can we talk about getting the Stick back and killing the criminal!"

From the tone of his voice, sounded like He Shiwo was 90% confident he would win.

Yelu Qi was a patient man, but upon hearing He Shiwo, he couldn't help but feel offended. But he still maintained his composure and said, "Younger Brother is indeed not worthy to accept this heavy responsibility. Therefore, if Older Brother He would like to teach me a thing or two, I will humbly accept."

"Good! Good!" said He Shiwo coldly. He planted his own stick on the stage floor, and thrust his fist at Yelu Qi. His attack did not seem to carry a lot of strength, but his fist created a gust of wind that Elder Liang – who was standing about two meters away, felt his face suddenly hot and hurting. This made him leap to the edge of the stage.

Yelu Qi did not hesitate, his left hand made a turn and neutralized the attack, while his right hand counter attacked with the 'Concealed Deep as if Empty' move[shen cang ruo xu], a stance from his 72-stance "Vacant Fist Technique". Two people moved their fists and feet, engaged in a fierce battle on the stage.

It was almost 'xu shi' [about 7-9pm]. It was a moonless and starless night. The audience could see everything clearly,

because there were dozens of big torches lighting all sides of the stage.

Huang Rong kept her eyes open, but she was amazed that after more than ten stances Yelu Qi did not show any signs that he had gained the upper hand. Also, as hard as she tried, she could not recognize which school He Shiwo belonged to. She could tell though, that He Shiwo had trained for at least forty years.

“For these last eleven or twelve years I have seen the list of the Beggar Clan disciples,” she thought, “and He Shiwo has steadily climbed up in rank. Funny thing is I’ve never heard anybody mentioning his martial arts. Who knew that in reality he possesses such high skills? I believe he did not accidentally learn this skill. Could it be that he has hidden his true skill just to wait for a time like this?”

The match was fierce. They had exchanged more than fifty stances, and Yelu Qi was starting to feel alarmed. No matter what stances he used against his opponent, He Shiwo could parry very well. It turned out this beggar is the toughest opponent he had fought so far. He Shiwo on the other hand, was not highly offensive, and seemed like he wanted to conserve his energy and waited for something to happen.

Yelu Qi had fought several opponents today, but with the exception of Lan Tianhe, the rest were ordinary martial artists. He did not have to use too much effort to defeat them. Thus he was very surprised to see He Shiwo’s agility. Seemed like He Shiwo was floating around indefinitely, and launching his sudden attacks that carried a strong gust of wind.

Yelu Qi was Zhou Botong’s head disciple. True, he had not mastered his Master’s “Dividing the Mind” skill, but he had mastered about 80 to 90% of the Quanzhen Sect’s martial arts. It could be said that he could be regarded as one of the

top level martial artists. Under the bright fire light around the stage, both he and his opponent moved very fast and their match was rather enjoyable to watch.

“Brother Jing, can you guess He Shiwo’s school of martial arts?” Huang Rong finally asked her husband.

“Up to this very second he has not shown his true skill,” answered Guo Jing. “I think he is trying to hide his origin. Just wait another seventy or eighty stances. By then Qi’er will gain the upper hand. If he does not give up, he will be forced to show his true skill.”

The match was picking up speed. Both opponents attacked and counterattacked, both still showed their agility. In a short time they have exchanged forty or fifty stances. Very soon they would reach the seventieth stance, then the eightieth. Guo Jing’s prediction was accurate; Yelu Qi was beginning to control his opponent’s moves.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong kept their eyes open. If He Shiwo kept hiding his true skill and fighting with mixed-up techniques, he would certainly suffer a loss.

Yelu Qi could also see his opponent’s predicament. Gradually but carefully he increased his strength. He stayed calm and did not want to make any reckless moves.

Suddenly He Shiwo changed his tactics; he swung his long sleeve out then immediately pulled it back. As a result, the dozens of torches around the stage were extinguished. The stage became pitch dark. While nobody could see anything, they heard both Yelu Qi and He Shiwo’s surprised shouts, and then they heard somebody thrown down from the stage. All the while He Shiwo was heard laughing maniacally.

Nothing else was heard except He Shiwo’s laugh. Everyone was shocked. A moment later Elder Liang came to his senses

and barked a command, "Light up the torches!" Immediately several beggars complied.

When the light was back, it was seen that it was Yelu Qi who stood on the ground. He had a bleeding wound on his left cheek, the size of a wine cup; while He Shiwo stretched out his left arm and coldly said, "Good protective vest! Good protective vest!" His palm was bleeding.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong exchanged another glance. They realized that because Guo Fu loved her husband, she had loaned him her soft hedgehog armor [ruan wei jia]. Therefore, when He Shiwo hit Yelu Qi, he hit the vest instead and his palm was injured by the thorns. Still, nobody knew how Yelu Qi got injured and fell off the stage.

What had happened was, at a critical time, He Shiwo had used his 'big wind sleeve' [da feng xiu] technique to extinguish the torches. Yelu Qi was startled when the stage suddenly darkened, but he still remembered to protect himself by striking first. But again he was surprised because his hand touched something cold, a metal weapon. He realized now that He Shiwo had planned to use a dirty trick in the darkness. Yelu Qi knew he was in danger, but he was not afraid. He kept going with his 'Great Capturing' [da qin na shou] technique, trying to snatch his opponent's weapon with the intention of showing it off to the audience. With the 'Skilled Hand in all Directions' [qiao shou ba da] he managed to get within two feet of He Shiwo. His right hand grabbed the weapon while his left hand hit his opponent's face, forcing He Shiwo to let go of his weapon.

In the dark He Shiwo eluded the attack to his face by turning his head and had no choice but to let go of his weapon. While Yelu Qi was pulling the weapon, he felt a sting on his cheek and at the same time his chest was hit hard, which made him stagger and fall from the stage. The weapon had a secret

equipment inside. As soon as it was grabbed, it was separated into two parts. The first part stayed in Yelu Qi's hand, while the second part flew back and hit Yelu Qi on the cheek, making a half-inch deep wound so that his cheekbone was visible. Fortunately it did not hit any vital organs, and fortunately he was wearing the protective vest so that his opponent was also injured.

Guo Fu was shocked and enraged; she leaped to her husband, trying to protect him.

Elder Liang was facing a dilemma. On one hand he knew He Shiwo had used a dirty trick, on the other hand, nobody knew what exactly happened, hence nobody could prove it. Both parties were injured, but Yelu Qi was thrown from the stage, so he could be considered the loser.

Guo Fu could not accept it. "He used a dirty trick!" she angrily shouted, "Brother Qi, go up there and fight him!"

Yelu Qi shook his head. "Even so, he still won," he said. "Even if we used honest techniques, I am not confident enough of victory against him."

Huang Rong signaled her son-in-law to come close so she could see what was inside Yelu Qi's hand. It was a piece of steel, about five-inches long and looked like a fan's spine. She could not remember who in the Jianghu world used that kind of weapon.

While everybody was still quiet from shock, He Shiwo raised his yellow and swollen ugly face, and was heard saying, "Even though this lowly beggar has defeated Master Yelu, I still do not dare to accept the Chief's position. I want to wait until the stick is back and the enemy Hou Dou has been killed."

His speech was received with loud cheers by the Beggar Clan's disciples. Although his victory was questionable, he had demonstrated his high martial arts. After listening to his speech a lot of beggars lifted up their cups to toast him.

He Shiwo then stood on the edge of the stage and cupped his fists to the audience. "Is there any hero out there who would like to teach me a lesson or two?" he challenged.

He was just saying the word 'stage' when Shi Bowei loudly shouted, "Ah!" followed by his army of animals. Suddenly the beasts – which were sitting neatly in formation, leaped up and loudly roared. A single lion or tiger's roar is loud; imagine all five hundreds animals roaring at the same time. The earth shook, wine cups and rice bowl turned upside down, everybody was aghast.

Amidst the loud noise, the Xishan Ghosts and Shi Brothers, fifteen people, leaped toward the stage, unsheathed their weapons and surrounded the stage. Suddenly eight people, each holding high a torch, were seen entering the field and coming straight toward the stage. Somebody said loud and clear, "The Eagle Hero wishes the Second Miss Guo a happy birthday! We deliver the third present."

They moved fast, like they were flying above the ground; a demonstration of a very high lightness kung fu. In no time they had come close to Guo Xiang. Four of them then stretched out their arms, presenting Guo Xiang with a big sack. It seemed the present was inside the sack.

Then these eight people cupped their fists to her and introduced themselves. Everybody who heard their names was surprised. They were not ordinary people. The first was an old Buddhist monk, none other than the Abbot of Mount Wutai's Foguang Monastery, Reverend Tanhua. He was the peer of the Shaolin's Abbot, Zen Master Tianming. The others were old Marquis Zhao and the Deaf and Mute Dhuta,

Qingling Zi, the leader of the Kunlun School, etc. All of them were seniors of the martial arts realm.

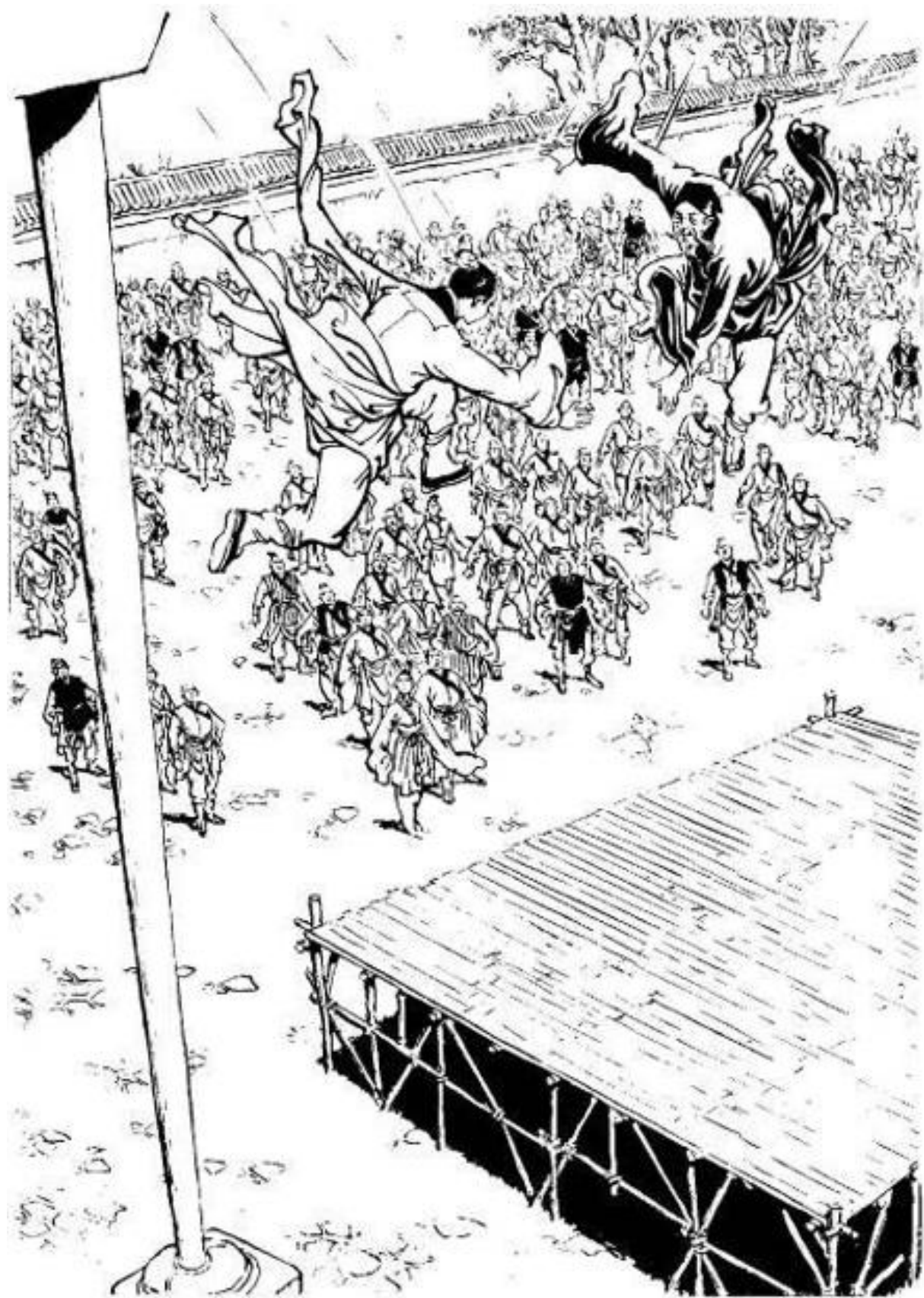
Guo Xiang did not seem to care about the background of all these people. She returned their greeting and laughing sweetly she asked, "I have bothered you all, Uncles! Thank you! What kind of toy is that?"

The four people holding the sack gave a strong tug and the sack was ripped into four pieces. A bald headed monk rolled out of the sack.

End of Chapter 36.

Chapter 37 - Gratitudes and Grudges Over Three Generations

Translated by Hugh (aka IcyFox) with excerpts by Athena



Under the moonlight, the two people descended gracefully, with their clothes floating in the wind. One was wearing a refined green robe while the other was a one-armed man wearing a blue shirt. It was indeed Yang Guo and Huang Yao Shi. Huang Yao Shi took Yang Guo's hand and the two people landed on the stage.

The monk's shoulder hit the ground then he stood up, appearing to be very agile. His face was red with fury and he shouted some words that seemed unintelligible. Guo Jing and Huang Rong knew he was the Golden Wheel Monk's (Jinlun Fawang) second disciple Da'erba and did not know how Master Tan Hua and Old Master Zhao captured him.

Guo Xiang thought there would be some amusing toy in the sack but saw a rough-looking monk instead, so she was somewhat disappointed and said, "I don't like this monk that Big Brother has given me. Where is he? Why is he still not here?"

One of those who came to deliver the third present had spent some time in Tibet and understood Tibetan, so he whispered a few words to Da'erba. His face changed and he stared at He Shiwo. The man, Qingling Zi (Green Spirit Sage), said a few more words in Tibetan to him, then handed Da'erba his golden rod which had been taken away when he was captured by the eight experts.

Da'erba raised his rod with a shout and jumped onto the stage.

The man laughed and told Guo Xiang, "Miss Guo, this monk can do magic tricks, the Eagle Hero told me to conjure a few tricks for you." Guo Xiang was happy and clapped her hands, saying, "Oh OK, I was starting to wonder why Big Brother spent such a great effort to bring the monk here."

Da'erba shouted a few grunts at He Shiwo. He Shiwo said, "What the hell are you yelling about? I don't understand the words that are coming out of your mouth!" Da'erba stepped forward fiercely and smashed the rod towards his head. He Shiwo quickly avoided the blow. Da'erba spun his rod and attacked swiftly. He Shiwo was fighting single-handedly and was pushed back by Da'erba's heavy assault.

The Beggar Clan members saw this monk was so fierce and his face full of hatred so they quickly rushed forward. Elder Liang said, "Big Monk, don't cause any trouble here. He's the future Beggar Clan leader." But Da'erba ignored him and kept on spinning his rod, causing golden flashes and gusts of wind together with heavy crashing sounds.

Several Beggar Clan members could not control themselves and jumped towards the stage, attempting to stop the fight. However the eight experts, Shi brothers and Xishan Ghosts surrounded the stage and prevented anyone from accessing the stage. Although the Beggar Clan had many people, they were held back and could not get onto the stage. Amidst the confusion Qingling Zi turned around, went up on the stage and took away He Shiwo's metal staff. He Shiwo was shocked and tried to snatch it back but was blocked by Da'erba's rod and could not advance a single step.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong could not guess why Yang Guo sent these people here to create trouble, but since the first two presents he gave Guo Xiang were beneficial to Xiangyang, they guessed this third present would not mean any harm. The Guo couple stood aside and watched silently.

Although Yelu Qi was beaten by He Shiwo, he was eager to continue his mother-in-law's great service to the Beggar Clan, so when he saw He Shiwo panicking under Da'erba's attacks, he shouted, "Brother He, don't panic, I'm going to help you!" He jumped towards the stage. A person shouted

fiercely, "Nobody's allowed on the stage!" Then the person blocked his way. Yelu Qi stretched his hand out to grab him but that person caught his hand instead with a strange move and such great internal strength that he could not move. Yelu Qi was shocked and saw that it was the third of the Shi brothers Shi Shugang. Yelu Qi exchanged a few moves but still could not force him to retreat, so he thought, "This person is a small fry and under the Eagle Hero's command, yet he is so remarkable. Because the Eagle Hero is able to command all these experts, he must be a really great man." Qingling Zi raised the iron staff and shouted, "Ladies and gentlemen, please take a look at this." He chopped down on the rod's middle with his hand and the rod broke - it was actually hollow. He pulled one end off and took out a bright green bamboo rod.

The Beggar Clan members were momentarily stunned and speechless, then all cried out together, "The leader's "Dog Beating Stick"!" The Shi Brothers and other experts stepped aside. Everyone was wondering, "Why was the "Dog Beating Stick" concealed in the iron staff? How did He Shiwo get his hands on it? Why did he not reveal it?"

The people were all waiting for Qingling Zi to explain everything but he wordlessly stepped down from the stage and handed the "Dog Beating Stick" respectfully with both hands to Guo Xiang. Guo Xiang saw the rod and thought about Lu Youjiao and became sad; she received the rod then handed it to Huang Rong. Da'erba's rod moves became more intense and He Shiwo had to evade the dangerous stances with his agility. When the Beggar Clan members saw the "Dog Beating Stick", they knew the experts must have a good reason for bringing Da'erba here to deal with He Shiwo, so none of them pushed their way up on stage.

In less than ten moves, He Shiwo looked like he would die under the golden rod, then Huang Rong suddenly thought,

“He Shiwo used a weapon to hurt Qi’er, so the weapon must be concealed in his sleeve. Yet at this critical juncture, why doesn’t he use his weapon?” Da’erba swept his rod on the stage and He Shiwo leapt up and evaded it. Da’erba flipped his rod and brought it upwards. He Shiwo was in midair and could not evade this attack. Suddenly a clash of weapons was heard and He Shiwo leaped aside with a short weapon in his hand. Da’erba was seething with anger and cursed him and increased the intensity of his rod attacks. However, with a weapon in He Shiwo’s hand, his martial skills increased and his strokes became masterful. Although his weapon was short, he was able to fend off Da’erba. Zhu Ziliu saw this and suddenly remembered something, saying, “Madam Guo, I know who he is. But I still don’t understand something.”

Huang Rong laughed, “That it was pasted on with glue, honey and flour.” Yelu Qi, Guo Fu and Guo Xiang were standing next to Huang Rong and heard their conversation but did not understand what on Earth they were talking about.

Guo Fu asked, “Uncle Zhu, who did you say was who?”

Zhu Ziliu said, “I’m talking about the He Shiwo who injured your husband.”

Guo Fu said, “What? He’s not He Shiwo? Then who is he?”

Zhu Ziliu said, “Look carefully, what weapon is he using?”

Guo Fu stared for a while then said, “This short weapon is less than a foot, and it’s not sharp like those pens used to seal accupoints.”

Huang Rong said, “Think carefully. He’d rather not use his weapon and risk discovery, thus putting his life on the line fighting the monk. Why doesn’t he use his weapon? Why did he extinguish the torches before using his weapon?”

Guo Fu said, "This person is sly and crafty, what's wrong with that?"

Guo Xiang said, "He knows someone in the crowd will recognize his weapon techniques, so he doesn't want to reveal it."

Zhu Ziliu praised, "Ah ha, Miss Guo is indeed clever."

Guo Fu heard him praise her sister and was not happy so she said, "What about not revealing the truth? Isn't he standing on the stage? Everyone can see that."

Guo Xiang thought about what her mother just said and replied, "Ah, his ugly face is actually a disguise made of flour. This face is really repulsive, after glancing once I don't want to see it anymore."

Huang Rong said, "The more repulsive he disguises himself, the more he can conceal his identity because no one wants to stare at an ugly face for long. If there are any changes to his disguise no one would notice them. Ah, it's really not easy keeping up such a disguise for so many years."

Zhu Ziliu said, "His face may be false, but his decades worth of martial arts can't be faked."

Guo Fu said, "If this He Shiwo is fake, then who's he? Sister, since you're so clever, tell us who he is."

Guo Xiang said, "I'm not that clever, so I don't know."

Zhu Ziliu smiled, "Elder Miss Guo has seen him before, and at that time the younger Miss Guo wasn't even born yet. Seventeen years ago, at the Da Sheng 'Heroes' Meet, someone exchanged a few hundred moves with me, who was that?"

Guo Fu said, "Hou Du? No, it can't be him. He uses a fan. Although this weapon looks like it, this weapon only has the skeleton but not the surface."

Zhu Ziliu said, "I fought such an intense battle with him before, it was the only time in my life I experienced such great danger, how could I possibly forget his stances? If he isn't Hou Du then I must be blind."

Guo Fu looked at He Shiwo again and saw that he was agile and his strokes lethal. It really appeared to be like the Hou Du at the 'Heroes' Meet years ago, but she still had many doubts. She asked, "If he's really Hou Du, then this monk is his martial brother, can it be he doesn't recognize him so that's why they're fighting?"

Huang Rong said, "It's precisely because he recognizes him that they're fighting. That year at Chongyang Palace, Yang Guo used his sword to pin down Da'erba and Hou Du. Hou Du didn't want to risk his life so he deserted Da'erba and his master. He ran away. This incident was witnessed by the whole the Quanzhen Sect, you must have heard of that too."

Guo Fu said, "Hmmm, no wonder Da'erba hates him so much."

When Guo Xiang heard "Yang Guo used his sword to pin down Da'erba and Hou Du" she thought of how great he was and was awe-struck.

Guo Fu asked, "Why did he become a beggar? How did the "Dog Beating Stick" end up with him?"

Huang Rong said, "Isn't that easy? Hou Du betrayed his master, so he's afraid his master and martial brother will find him, hence he disguised his face and joined the Beggar Clan. Without revealing who he is, he slowly rose to be a 5th grade member over the past 10-over years. Since no one in the

Beggar Clan was suspicious of him, Fawang wasn't able to find him. But this scoundrel wouldn't be content with hiding here all his life so he was waiting for an opportunity to do something big. When Leader Lu was patrolling outside the city, he waited there and ambushed him, revealing his identity and a message for the beggars to bring back, which was to tell everyone Leader Lu was killed by Hou Du. After he snatched the "Dog Beating Stick", he hid it inside his hollow metal staff. When the Beggar Clan elected a leader, he could raise the matter of finding the "Dog Beating Stick". Since the Stick is a very significant icon of the Beggar Clan, who can oppose him? Ah, this scoundrel Hou Du is a really brilliant schemer to think of this plan."

Zhu Ziliu laughed, "But with you around Madam Guo, he can't hide anything from us."

Huang Rong didn't laugh and said, "Hou Du hid himself in the Beggar Clan without revealing his identity and was able to fool me. But by trying to vie for the Beggar Clan Leader's position, he's really looking down on me."

Zhu Ziliu said, "Yang Guo is really wonderful; he actually was able to discover Hou Du's scheme, recover the "Dog Beating Stick", reveal his identity and give the younger Miss Guo this present. He's very capable."

Guo Fu said, "Humph, he happened to find out, there's nothing great about that."

Guo Xiang thought, "That day Big Brother was outside the Yang Tai Fu Temple and saw me mourning Uncle Lu. He knew I was great pals with Uncle Lu so he put in a lot of effort to help me avenge him; this present is no small thing, his efforts..." Then she suddenly thought of something and said, "Although Hou Du became an ugly beggar in the Beggar Clan, he still uses his true identity to cause trouble outside. Third Uncle Shi of the Shi brothers was injured by him before

and must have wanted to settle this matter with him and so tracked him down.”

Huang Rong said, “Correct. Hou Du leaves a trail behind in Jianghu time and again, but no one would expect the Beggar Clan’s He Shiwo and Hou Du to be the same person. ‘He Shiwo’, look at his fake name – he regards himself as his own master. When someone thinks too highly of himself, he will inevitably fail one day.”

Guo Fu said, “Mother, then why does this He Shiwo say he wants to kill Hou Du? Isn’t that silly?”

Huang Rong said, “This is just a sham to remove any doubts.”

Guo Fu said, “Since Yang... Brother Yang already knew He Shiwo is Hou Du, he should have said it long ago and not allowed him to injure Brother Qi.”

Huang Rong laughed, “Yang Guo is not God; how would he know that Qi’er would get injured?”

Guo Xiang said, “But Sister is a Goddess, so she let Brother-in-law don the Soft Armour.” Guo Fu glared at her, but she felt kind of proud inside.

As they were talking, the fight between Da’erba and Hou Du got even fiercer. The two had the same master so they were familiar with each other’s martial arts – Da’erba was superior in strength but Hou Du was superior in agility. After another hundred moves, there was still no clear victor. Suddenly Da’erba shouted and threw his 50-jin rod towards Hou Du and it flew swiftly and fiercely. Hou Du was shocked as he has never seen Da’erba use such a move before. He thought, “He has not won after so long, has he gone crazy?” and quickly jumped aside. Da’erba rushed up and hit the rod with his palms and it changed directions, following closely behind Hou Du. Hou Du was greatly surprised, then he realized that

Da'erba had followed their master for over 10 years and must have learned some advanced martial arts. This rod move was derived from Fawang's Five-Wheel techniques and when Hou Du saw the ferocity of the rod coming towards him and knew he could not take the blow. He slid away, causing the rod to miss his head by two inches.

Da'erba was spinning the rod even more rapidly, causing the torches to flicker under the great gusts of wind. Hou Du was jumping around on the darkly-lit stage and was in danger many times. The spectators all stared at this violent battle and could not take their eyes off it. Da'erba threw the rod eighteen times then he shouted, using both hands to shoot his rod like an arrow. Hou Du could not evade this and the rod hit him squarely in the chest with a bang. He slowly collapsed onto the stage and remained motionless.

Da'erba took his rod and called out thrice, and then he sat down in front of Hou Du and mumbled the "Reincarnation Chant". Then he jumped off the stage and presented his weapon to Qingling Zi. Qingling Zi did not accept the weapon but said, "Congratulations. You have rid your sect of a scum. The Eagle Hero will spare you and wants you to return to Tibet, and never set foot in the Central Plains again." Da'erba said, "Thanks to the Eagle Hero. I shall follow his instructions." He bowed and went off.

Guo Fu saw Hou Du lying motionlessly on the stage with his hideous face and could not believe it was fake, so she drew her sword and jumped onto the stage, saying, "Let's see what this traitor really looks like." She then used her sword's tip to poke his nose.

Suddenly Hou Du shouted and leapt up, forcefully striking his palms downwards. Actually after being hit by the golden rod, he was fatally injured but he did not die immediately. He purposely remained motionless, waiting for Da'erba to come

forward and examine him so that he could execute a fatal move and cause Da'erba to die with him. However Da'erba just chanted some prayers and left immediately. Then Guo Fu came forward instead. Hou Du pretended to come back to life and stunned her to reduce her resistance. Her Soft Armour was with Yelu Qi so it seemed death was imminent. Guo Jing, Huang Rong and Yelu Qi jumped onto the stage but it seemed too late...

Then two 'peng' sounds were heard and two projectiles flew through the air side by side and pierced Hou Du's chest. The projectiles were small and seemed like pebbles but the force behind them was mighty. Hou Du leaned back and collapsed backwards, throwing up a pool of blood. He was dead. The people were shocked and looked in the direction where the projectiles had come from but only saw the pale moon and the starry night. The night was still and the projectiles seemed to have been launched from on top one of the two flag poles erected in front of the stage.

When Huang Rong heard the projectiles hurtling through the air, she knew that apart from her father's 'Divine Flicking Finger' [Dan Zi Shen Tong], no one else had this skill. The two flag poles were more than ten yards apart, how could the projectiles come from the two flag poles at the same time? Surprised, she did not think clearly, so she said, "Father, is that you?"

An old voice from atop one of the flag poles laughed, "My friend Yang Guo, let's go down!" The voice atop the other flag pole replied, "Yes!" and the two people jumped down together.

Huang Yaoshi taught Yang Guo the Divine Flicking Finger to counter Li Mochou years ago. Under the moonlight, the two people descended gracefully, with their clothes floating in the wind. One was wearing a refined green robe while the

other was a one-armed man wearing a blue shirt. It was indeed Yang Guo and Huang Yaoshi. Huang Yaoshi took Yang Guo's hand and the two people landed on the stage. The people thought they were witnessing the Celestial Generals descending from the heavens.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong quickly jumped up on the stage and bowed to Huang Yaoshi. Then Yang Guo bowed to Guo Jing and Huang Rong, saying, "Nephew Yang Guo kowtows to Uncle and Aunt Guo."

Guo Jing quickly raised him and laughed, "Guo'er, your three presents, ah, are really... really..." He was very grateful and could not find any words to express his gratitude.

Guo Fu was afraid her father wanted her to thank Yang Guo for saving her life so she quickly said to Huang Yaoshi, "Grandfather, fortunately you used your "Divine Flicking Finger" and saved me from that scoundrel's palms."

Yang Guo jumped off the stage and walked over to Guo Xiang, laughing, "Sister, I'm late."

Guo Xiang felt her heart beating rapidly and her face turned red so she softly said, "You spent so much effort to get me the three presents, it was really... really a lot of trouble."

Yang Guo smiled, "It was nothing. Since it's your birthday we merely added to the fun." He then waved his hand.

The Big Head Ghost said, "Bring everything up." Then several people also repeated, "Bring everything up." The message was then relayed outside.

After a while a group of people came in with lanterns, baskets and planks. They then put the planks together and started nailing, forming a wooden stage. More and more people came in but they moved in an orderly way and worked silently.

When the people saw Yang Guo's presents they all respected and admired him deeply. They also thought he brought those people here for some major purpose. However, before long the stage was completed and some people started drumming and donning opera costumes and performing "The Eight Immortals Celebrate a Birthday". Following that several people entered from the west and started singing "Man Chuang Hu", a song from the story of Guo Ziyi celebrating his birthday with his seven sons and eight sons-in-law. At the same time some people lit firecrackers and some did conjuring tricks, turning the whole event into a grand celebration. The performers were famous troupes from Henan and Huguang. Everyone was in a festive mood and were dancing and cheering all over the field. By this time the Shi brothers had quietly left with their animals and the Xishan Ghosts, Qingling Zi and the group of experts followed suit.

Guo Xiang saw that Yang Guo had arranged the matter down to the last detail and she was moved to tears, remaining speechless for a while.

Guo Fu remembered their conversation at the Yang Tai Fu Temple, and now a young hero actually came to celebrate her birthday; she was secretly seething with anger. She just took Huang Yaoshi's arm and bombarded him with questions, pretending she did not see anything.

Guo Jing felt the way Yang Guo celebrated his daughter's birthday was making a mountain out of a mole-hill but he was broadminded. Moreover, Yang Guo helped Xiangyang and the Beggar Clan accomplish three great feats in one day so Guo Jing just let him do whatever he wanted, only shaking his head with a smile.

Huang Rong asked her father, "Father, did you arrange with Guo'er to hide on top of the flag poles?"

Huang Yaoshi laughed, "No, no! One day I was at a lake admiring the moon when I heard some people whispering that some "Eagle Hero" would be visiting Xiangyang and that his martial arts were excellent and his character strange. I was worried he wanted to harm my good daughter and son-in-law so I came here secretly. So this Eagle Hero is Yang Guo. If I'd known earlier I needn't have worried so much."

Huang Rong knew her father liked to roam Jianghu but was always thinking of her, so she laughed, "Father, don't go away again, let us be reunited."

Huang Yaoshi did not answer and waved to Guo Xiang, laughing, "Little girl, come over here and let Grandfather take a look at you." Guo Xiang had never met him before so she quickly stepped forward to bow to him. Huang Yaoshi took her hand and closely examined her face, saying sadly, "What a great resemblance." Huang Rong knew he was thinking of his late wife, so he was saying that Guo Xiang looked like her grandmother. She was afraid to stir his emotions so she did not say anything.

Guo Fu laughed, "Of course! You're the Old Eastern Heretic and she's the Little Eastern Heretic..."

Guo Jing scolded, "Fu'er, you have no respect for your grandfather!" Huang Yaoshi was however delighted and said, "Xiang'er, are you the 'Little Eastern Heretic'?" Guo Xiang blushed and said, "At first it was only Sister who called me that, later on everyone called me that."

At this time the four Elders of the Beggar Clan crowded around Yang Guo and thanked him profusely, thinking, "He's rendered such a great service to Xiangyang, recovered the "Dog Beating Stick", exposed Hou Du's devious plan, avenged Leader Lu. If he's willing to be the next Leader that would be splendid." Elder Liang said, "Hero Yang, our late leader passed away tragically..."

Yang Guo had already guessed what they were up to and quickly interrupted, "Master Yelu is proficient in both martial arts and literature, he's heroic and compassionate and he is a great friend of mine. If he becomes the new Leader, he will be able to continue the great legacy of Leaders Hong, Huang and Lu."

Huang Yaoshi briefly asked about Guo Xiang's martial arts and turned his head to get Yang Guo over to talk to him. When he turned around, he saw Yang Guo already walking out of the place so he said, "My friend Yang Guo, I'm off too!" He waved his sleeves and in the blink of an eye he had caught up with Yang Guo. The two of them swiftly disappeared into the darkness.

Huang Rong had something urgent to tell her Father but because there were too many people around it was not convenient to speak. Who would have thought he would suddenly leave, she was shocked and quickly gave chase.

However Huang Yaoshi and Yang Guo moved extremely fast and Huang Rong could not catch up. Huang Rong said, "Father, Guo'er, how about leaving after a few days?" Huang Yaoshi's distant voice said, "We both have wild characters and are uncomfortable with restrictions, just let us be." The last few words seemed to be almost a hundred meters away. Huang Rong, secretly groaning since she could not catch up, had to go back. Back at the field, drumming noises filled the night.

The four Elders of the Beggar Clan held a discussion. Firstly, before Hou Du came and messed things up, Yelu Qi had already been elected the Leader. Secondly, the Beggar Clan owed great debt of gratitude to Yang Guo, so since even he nominated Yelu Qi, then the affair was settled. The four Elders informed Huang Rong and ascended the stage and proclaimed Yelu Qi the new Beggar Clan Leader.

The Beggar Clan members all carried out their tradition and spat on Yelu Qi. They then clapped and cheered.

Guo Xiang noticed that this time Yang Guo only said a few words to her and left shortly after meeting her. She felt rather disappointed inside, and then she saw her sister standing next to Yelu Qi and receiving congratulations from the Beggar Clan members. She felt even worse so she turned around and headed home. She had not gone a few steps when Huang Rong caught up with her and held her hand, gently saying, "Xiang'er, what is it? Are you unhappy?" Guo Xiang said, "No, I'm extremely delighted." After saying this she lowered her head and tears welled up in her eyes, and then fell to the ground. Huang Rong could not understand her daughter's heart so she mentioned some interesting stories to make her happy.

The two people slowly went home. Huang Rong accompanied her back to her room and asked, "Xiang'er, are you tired?"

Guo Xiang said, "I'm alright. Mother, you've been up all night, you should rest."

Huang Rong pulled her close and sat shoulder-to-shoulder on the bed and fondled her hair, saying, "Xiang'er, I've never mentioned the matter of your brother Yang Guo to you before. This is a long story, so if you're not tired, I'll tell it to you." That caught Guo Xiang's attention and she said, "Mother, tell me."

Huang Rong said, "I should start from his grandfather." Then she told her how Guo Xiaotian and Yang Tiexin became sworn brothers, how they swore their children even before birth, how Yang Kang acknowledged the enemy as his father and lost his life, why Yang Guo lived on Peach Blossom Island when young, why Guo Fu chopped off his arm and how he and Xiao Longnu separated at the Passionless Valley. She told the entire story to her.

Huang Rong then sighed and said, "At first I was suspicious of him and was afraid nothing good would come out of you knowing him. Ah, in terms of trusting people I'm way behind your father. Your brother Yang Guo did three great things tonight so instead of being evil, he's far from it. We really owe him a debt of gratitude."

Guo Xiang curiously asked, "Mother, why would he be evil?"

Huang Rong said, "At first I thought wrongly, I thought he bore a deep hatred for our Guo family and wanted to take revenge on you."

Guo Xiang shook her head, "How could that be? If he wanted to kill me it would be all too easy. At Feng Lingdu, all he needed was his little finger to kill me."

Huang Rong said, "You're still young. You don't know about all these things yet. If he wanted you to suffer and make us worried and depressed, it would be ten times more terrible than killing a person. Ah, there's no need to say more, now I know he won't. But I'm still worried over something."

Guo Xiang said, "Mother, what's there to worry about? I think brother Yang won't take past matters to heart. He will be reunited with Sister-in-law soon and he'd be so happy he'd forget everything."

Huang Rong said, "That's exactly what I'm worried about; he may not get to see Xiao Longnu."

Guo Xiang was shocked and said, "What? How could that be? Brother Yang personally told me Sister-in-law was badly injured and was taken away by the Divine Nun of the South Sea [Nan Hai Shen Ni] for treatment and arranged to meet again 16 years later. The couple has deep feelings for each other, why wouldn't they meet after waiting for so long?"

Huang Rong frowned and only said, "Hmmmmmm." Guo Xiang said, "Brother Yang told me she carved several words on the 'Broken Heart Cliff' which said, 'sixteen years later, meet at this place, the love between (us) husband and wife is profoundly deep, never fail this promise' Could the words be false?"

Huang Rong said, "The words are genuine, but I'm afraid Xiao Longnu loved Yang Guo too much so he won't be able to see her again."

Guo Xiang did not know what in Heaven's name Huang Rong was talking about and stared at her expectantly. Huang Rong said, "sixteen years ago, your Brother Yang and his wife were seriously injured; Brother Yang's injuries could be treated while Xiao Longnu's poison attacked her major accupoints. He saw that she wouldn't likely survive and didn't want to accept treatment." When she said this, her voice became soft and gentle and continued, "Ah, you're still young, you won't understand."

Guo Xiang was lost in thought for a while then said, "Mother, if I were Sister-in-law, I'd pretend I'm alright and let him take the medicine to recover."

Huang Rong was surprised; she had never expected her daughter to be so thoughtful of others at such a young age, so she said, "Correct, I'm afraid Xiao Longnu did just that and left Yang Guo. She earnestly said 'the love between (us) husband and wife is profoundly deep, never fail this promise' and said 'please treasure this, beg that you fulfill this reunion'. When I saw 'please treasure this', I guessed Xiao Longnu disappeared suddenly to make your Brother Yang patiently and quietly wait for her for sixteen years. Ah, she thought after sixteen years, your Brother Yang would slowly forget her. Although he'd be disappointed, he wouldn't want to commit suicide."

Guo Xiang said, "Then what about the Divine Nun of the South Sea?" Huang Rong said, "I made that up. There's really no such person." Guo Xiang was shocked and stammered, "No... no such person?"

Huang Rong said, "That day at the Passionless Valley, I saw Yang Guo was so miserable that I could not help but make something up to console him and make him wait for the past sixteen years. I said the Divine Nun of the South Sea lived on Wisdom Island, but actually there's no such island. I also said she taught your grandfather some palm strokes to reduce his suspicions. This Yang Guo is so intelligent, if I didn't make it sound realistic, how would he believe me? If he didn't, then Xiao Longnu's efforts would be wasted."

Guo Xiang said, "So you're saying Sister-in-law is already dead? This whole thing was just to fool him?"

Huang Rong quickly said, "No, no! Maybe Xiao Longnu is still alive and will meet him when the time comes; if so that'd be wonderful. She's the only disciple of the Ancient Tomb Sect, the founder Lin Chaoying was extremely knowledgeable and had profound martial arts and internal energy, so she might have left some incredible skill for Xiao Longnu to use to save her life."

Guo Xiang thought for a while then said, "Yeah, I think so too, Sister-in-law is such a kind person and Brother Yang loves her so much, she wouldn't die so easily. But if he doesn't get to meet her, won't he go crazy?"

Huang Rong said, "Today, when your grandfather came, I was thinking of asking him to cover up for us, but I was unable to do so."

Guo Xiang became worried and said, "Now Brother Yang and Grandfather are together, he'd surely ask about the Divine Nun of the South Sea. Grandfather doesn't know what's

going on and he'd surely let the cat out of the bag. That'll be terrible."

Huang Rong said, "If Xiao Longnu could be reunited with him, which would require a lot of luck, then everything would be fine. But if he doesn't get to see Xiao Longnu, then I really don't know what he'd do. He'd hate me deeply for lying to him and making him wait in loneliness for sixteen years."

Guo Xiang said, "Mother, don't worry, it was for his own good. You saved his life."

Huang Rong said, "Besides the deep friendship of the Guo and Yang families for the past three generations, Guo'er himself has saved your father, mother and sister numerous times. Today he did so much for Xiangyang, we are truly grateful and we can never repay him. Ah, Guo'er has been lonely almost all his life. He's already past thirty but the only happy moments he had only made up a few days."

Guo Xiang thought, "If Brother really can't meet Sister-in-law, he might really go crazy."

Huang Rong said, "Your Brother Yang is of good character, but he has gone through much hardship when young so he's rather eccentric, but his conduct is extraordinary."

Guo Xiang tried to smile and said, "He, Grandfather and I are all heretic people."

Huang Rong said, "Correct, he's a good man but he has a heretic aura. If Xiao Longnu has unfortunately passed away, you must never ever meet him again."

Guo Xiang never expected Huang Rong to say that so she quickly asked, "Why...Why not?"

Huang Rong held her hand and said, "If they get to meet, of course you can roam around with them or visit their home."

Even if you follow them to the edge of the world I wouldn't be worried. But if he doesn't get to meet her; Xiang'er, you don't know him well enough, if he goes crazy he's capable of anything."

Guo Xiang said, "Mother, if he doesn't see her, he'd be sad and depressed, so we should console him."

Huang Rong shook her head, saying, "He doesn't listen to others."

Guo Xiang thought for a while then said, "Mother, after sixteen years, do you think he would commit suicide in his sorrow?"

Huang Rong was quiet for a long while then replied, "I can guess what most people are thinking but I couldn't read your Brother Yang's thoughts since he was young. It's precisely because I can't guess what he'd do that I won't allow you to meet again; unless of course he's reunited with Xiao Longnu. Then that's a different story." Guo Xiang was lost in thought and did not respond.

Huang Rong said, "Xiang'er, Mother is doing this for your own good. If you don't listen to me, it might be too late when you regret it." She saw her daughter frowning and her eyes turn red, so she said gently, "Xiang'er, let me tell you something else. It's about your Brother Yang's father Yang Kang." So she then talked about how Yang Tiexin took Mu Nianci as his god daughter and how she sparred to find a husband, how she gave birth to Yang Guo and finally how she died of depression. Then she said, "Sister Mu Nianci's character and beauty were flawless, such a good girl is hard to come by, but she was tormented by her affairs of the heart and suffered such a sad fate."

Guo Xiang said, "Mother, she didn't have any choice. She loved Uncle Yang, so no matter what he did she still loved

him.”

Huang Rong stared at her and thought, “She’s so young, how does she know so much?” She saw that she was exhausted and her eyes could hardly stay open so she helped her get out of her clothes and tucked her into bed, saying, “Quickly close your eyes! I’ll watch you sleep then leave.” Guo Xiang closed her eyes and since she had not slept for the whole night she was really tired so she sank into a deep sleep soon after.

Huang Rong looked at her sweet and refined face she thought, “Among my three children, I worry about you the most. But among the three of you, I really can’t say who I pity the most.” She then returned to her room and slept.

The next evening, the Wu brothers sent back fast horses with the report that all the supplies at Nanyang had been destroyed; the gun powder had exploded and killed many Mongolian soldiers. After the loss, the Mongolians had withdrawn 100 li (50 km) and did not stir from their camp. When Xiangyang heard this message, everyone cheered with joy and kept talking about the Eagle Hero. Some exaggerated the story and made Yang Guo seem like a deity and excitedly talked about how he exterminated the vanguard forces and burned Nanyang. All of them talked as if they saw everything with their own eyes.

That night the Guo couple was invited by Lu Wenhuan to discuss the military situation so they reached home very late. The next morning Yelu Qi, Guo Fu and Guo Polu went to pay their respects but after a long while, Guo Xiang still had not turned up. Huang Rong got worried and instructed a maid to check her room to see if she’s ill. After a while, the maid came back with Guo Xiang’s maid saying, “The lady did not go to bed last night.”

Huang Rong was shocked and asked, "Then why didn't you say so last night?" Guo Xiang's maid Xiao Bangtou said, "Madam returned very late last night, so I didn't dare disturb you; I thought the lady would return after a while, I didn't know she'd still be missing until now."

Huang Rong quickly went to Guo Xiang's room and saw that she had not taken any spare clothes, weapons or money and was very curious. Then she saw a white slip of paper half-concealed under her pillow. Huang Rong knew something was wrong and she groaned inwardly then she picked up the slip of paper which said:

"Dear Father and Mother,
I'm going to convince Brother Yang not to commit suicide.
When I've done that, I'll return immediately.
Signed,
Xiang."

Huang Rong stood there motionless and thought, "This kid is really naïve. Given Yang Guo's character, apart from Xiao Longnu, he listens to no one. If he did, he wouldn't be Yang Guo." She wanted to quickly find her daughter but the Mongolians were slowly closing in on Xiangyang on two fronts and they could attack any time, so she could not attend to her daughter's private affairs. After discussing it with Guo Jing, she wrote several letters to some capable Beggar Clan members who would split up to look for Guo Xiang and bring her back.

That day after Guo Xiang heard her mother's stories, she had several nightmares shortly after falling asleep, dreaming that Yang Guo slit his throat with a sword, then dreaming that Yang Guo jumped off a high cliff and ended up in a bloody mess. After that she awoke in cold sweat so she sat up and thought carefully, "Brother gave me three golden needles and promised to do three things for me. I have one left, so I'll use it to get him not to commit suicide. He's a hero and won't

go back on his words, so I must find him.” So she left a short note and set off immediately.

However she hadn’t the slightest idea where Yang Guo and Huang Yaoshi could have gone so she walked rather aimlessly for around 30 li (15km) and became famished, so she tried to look for a food stall. But all the people around the city had fled even before the Mongolians had arrived so the whole place was lifeless like a ghost town. Guo Xiang had never gone out alone before, so she never expected to get into this mess. She sat down on a stone and folded her arms, becoming frustrated.

After sitting down for a while, she thought, “Since there’s no food stalls, I’ll pick some wild fruits.” She walked around but there was not even a single fruit tree for a few li. Just as she felt helpless, she suddenly heard a horse galloping. When the horse past her, she saw a tall and skinny yellow-robed monk mounted on the horse. The horse was very swift and was gone in the blink of an eye. But after going a few dozen meters, the horse turned around and returned. The horse stopped in front of Guo Xiang and the monk asked, “Lady, who’re you? Why are you here alone?”

Guo Xiang saw his piercing eyes and she shuddered. At the Black Dragon Marsh she met Reverend Yideng, so she thought, “Reverend Yideng is kind and benevolent; this monk should also be a good person.” She answered, “I’m named Guo, and I’m looking for someone.”

The monk asked, “Who?”

Guo Xiang shook her head and smiled, “You’re such a busybody, and I’m not talking to you.”

The monk said, “What does that person look like, maybe I’ve met him before and can tell you where he is.”

Guo Xiang thought this was not a bad idea and said, "You might not know him. He's a one-armed young man. He might be with a large eagle or he might be alone." That monk was actually Jinlun Fawang (Golden Wheel Monk) and he realized she was talking about Yang Guo. His heart missed a beat but he appeared normal, saying, "Ah, you're looking for someone named Yang Guo, right?"

Guo Xiang was delighted and said, "Yeah, you know him?"

Fawang laughed, "How would I not know him? He's my friend. We knew each other even before you were born."

Guo Xiang blushed slightly, then asked: "Big monk, what is your religious name?"

Fawang said, "I'm Zhu Mu Lang Ma." Zhu Mu Lang Ma (Chomolungma/Mount Everest) is the tallest mountain in Tibet and it's peak reached the clouds, so Fawang was trying to say his martial arts were unmatched in the world.

Guo Xiang said, "What a long and messy name."

Fawang said, "It's Zhu Mu Lang Ma."

Guo Xiang said, "OK, Reverend Zhu Mu Lang Ma, where is my brother?"

Fawang said, "Your brother?"

Guo Xiang said, "Yeah, Yang Guo."

Fawang said, "You call Yang Guo your brother? But you're Guo, right?"

Guo Xiang said, "We're sworn siblings, he lived in my home when he was young."

Fawang said, "I also have a sworn brother, we've known each other for many years, his martial arts are excellent and he is

very well-known, his name is Guo Jing, do you know him?"

Guo Xiang thought, "I sneaked out, if he's one of Father's friends he might want to take me home, so I'd better not tell him." So she said, "You're talking about Hero Guo? He's an elder in my family. You want to meet him?"

Fawang was clever and alert, how could he miss Guo Xiang's change in expression? He sighed, "He's my savior, we've not met for more than twenty years, and then I heard a rumour that he had passed away. I'm very sad, so I came here to pay my respects. Ah, heaven must be blind to make a hero's life so short." When he said this, tears started to fall. His internal strength is very strong and he can control his entire body's functions, so he could cry at will.

Guo Xiang saw him crying tragically, although she knew her father was not dead, she was still concerned about her father and her feelings were affected by him, so she said, "Big monk, don't worry, Hero Guo isn't dead."

Fawang said, "You're talking nonsense. He's really dead. What does a girl like you know?"

Guo Xiang said, "I just came out from Xiangyang, of course I'd know. I just saw Hero Guo yesterday."

Fawang faced the sky, laughing, "Ah, you're Hero Guo's daughter." Then he shook his head and said, "No, no, his daughter is Guo Fu, I know her too, she's around thirty-five this year, she's not as young as you."

Guo Xiang couldn't resist and said, "She's my elder sister. I'm Guo Xiang."

Fawang was delighted and thought, "I'm really in luck today. Such an opportunity is hard to come by." Then he said, "Oh OK, so Hero Guo's not dead."

Guo Xiang saw his happy expression and thought he was happy about her father, so she thought he was a nice person and said, "Of course he's not dead. If my father died, I'd die crying over him."

Fawang said, "OK, OK, I believe you. I'm not going to Xiangyang just yet. Please help me tell Hero Guo and Chief Huang that I send my regards to them."

However Guo Xiang was persistent in asking about Yang Guo, so as he was leaving she stopped him as he mounted the horse.

Guo Xiang said, "Hey big monk, why are you so unreasonable?"

Fawang said, "How so?"

Guo Xiang said, "I told you about my father yet you did not tell me anything about Yang Guo. So where is he?"

Fawang said, "Ah, yesterday at the valley north of Nanyang he was training his sword strokes. He might not have left yet, you can go find him."

Guo Xiang frowned, saying, "There're many valleys. Which is it? Please tell me clearly."

Fawang thought for a while then said, "OK! I'm going north anyway, so I'll take you there."

Guo Xiang said, "Thanks a lot."

Fawang took his horse over and said, "Miss, please ride the horse, I'll walk."

Guo Xiang said, "That's not such a good idea."

Fawang laughed, "This horse has four legs but it might not run faster than my two legs."

Guo Xiang was about to mount the horse then she said, "Oh yes, I'm very hungry, do you have anything to eat?" Fawang took a bag from his back and Guo Xiang ate two biscuits from it, then she rode the horse.

Fawang flipped his sleeves and followed behind. Guo Xiang thought about what he said so she took the reins and said, "Big monk, I'll be waiting for you out front." Before she finished speaking, the horse started galloping and charged forward.

This horse was very swift and Guo Xiang felt the wind in her face and saw the trees flash past her. She turned her head around and laughed, "Big monk, can you catch up?" Then she was slightly surprised as there was no trace of him behind. Then suddenly his voice came from the forest in front, saying, "Miss Guo, my horse is not very fast, you must whip it harder."

Guo Xiang was extremely curious, wondering how he had gotten in front. When the horse caught up, she saw the monk taking huge strides forward. Guo Xiang whipped the horse and it moved faster, but it always remained several meters behind, not able to catch up. By this time they had already reached the main road north of Xiangyang. The horse was kicking up a lot of dust while Fawang did not stir any sand or dirt and moved like the wind.

Guo Xiang was in awe of him and thought, "If he didn't have this level of martial arts he wouldn't be worthy of Father's sworn brotherhood." She respectfully said, "Big Monk, you're an elder, you should ride the horse, I'll follow slowly behind." Fawang laughed, "Why should we waste time? Don't you want to find your brother sooner?" By this time the horse was losing its speed and was lagging further behind Fawang.

Now two horses appeared up in front in the distance. Fawang said, "Let's capture those two horses and ride them

alternately so that we can move faster.” After a while the horses came closer and Fawang stretched out his hands, saying, “Get down and walk!”

The horses were shocked and neighed, stopping immediately. The riders however had good riding skills and did not fall from the horses. One of them angrily said, “Who’re you? Do you want to die?” He lashed out with his whip.

Guo Xiang happily said, “Big Head Ghost, Long Beard Ghost, don’t fight, we’re all friends!” The two riders were the Big Head Ghost and Long Beard Ghost of the Xishan Ghosts.

Then Fawang grabbed the whip and tried to seize it. However although the Big Head Ghost was small-sized, he had great strength and the whip was made of tough leather, so it did not snap even under Fawang’s force of a few hundred jin. Fawang said, “Not bad!” and increased his strength, pulling the Big Head Ghost off his horse.

The Big Head Ghost got angry and threw down his whip and charged forward, wanting to fight with Fawang. The Long Beard Ghost said, “Brother, wait!” Then he said, “Miss Guo, why are you together with the Golden Wheel Monk?” Many years ago Yang Guo had gone to the Passionless Valley with Fawang, so the Long Beard Ghost (Fan Yiweng) recognized him.

Guo Xiang laughed, “You’re mistaken, he’s Reverend Zhu Mu Lang Ma, a good friend of my father. The Golden Wheel Monk is my father’s enemy, so how could this be?”

Fan Yiweng asked, “Where did you meet him?”

Guo Xiang said, “I bumped into him not long ago. He said my father is dead, isn’t that silly? He wants to bring me to see Big Brother now.”

The Big Head Ghost said, "Quickly get over here. This monk is a bad person."

Guo Xiang became doubtful and asked, "Is he fooling me?"

The Big Head Ghost said, "The Eagle Hero is in the south, why is he taking you north?"

Fawang smiled and said, "These two midgets are talking garbage." He suddenly brought up his palms and struck them on the head.

For the past decade, Fawang had been training his "Dragon/Elephant Moving Skill" (Long Xiang Ban Lao Gong) and he had reached an unprecedented level in this fearsome skill. The "Dragon/Elephant Moving Skill" has thirteen levels; the first being very easy and even an idiot could master it within two years with some guidance. The second is more difficult than the first and requires about three to four years. The third level is even more difficult than the second and needs seven to eight years. So the difficulty level increases exponentially for each new level. For the fifth level alone, it usually requires more than thirty years to master. This profound skill was created by some obscure monk but no one has actually passed the tenth level. This skill is so profound that it is nearly impossible to complete all thirteen levels unless one could live to a thousand years old. The creator himself only mastered it to the eighth level and could make no more progress as he had reached a dangerous obstacle which he could not overcome. During the Northern Song Dynasty, a monk who mastered the ninth level trained without rest and managed to reach the tenth level, but in his excitement he lost control (what some might call a 'fire deviation') and became insane, dancing crazily for seven days and nights before severing his arteries and dying.

This Golden Wheel Monk, however, is a prodigy and through his hard work and intelligence, he managed to break through

the obstacle at the ninth level and reached the tenth level. This is an unprecedented achievement and no one will likely reach this level again. According to the description of the “Dragon/Elephant Moving Skill”, each palm thrust out is equivalent to the force generated by ten dragons and ten elephants. He knew he might not be able to reach the next level but he felt he did not have any opponents under the sky so he thought it was unnecessary to master the eleventh level. That year when he was defeated by Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu’s swords, it was the biggest defeat and insult in his whole life, so he trained relentlessly and now when the Khan is preparing to invade the south, he took this opportunity to come south and seek the Yang-Long couple for a re-match, hoping to avenge his bitter defeat.

Now when he struck out with his palms, the Big Head Ghost was struck on his arm and it broke immediately with a snap. Following that he was struck on his forehead and his brain was smashed in without even a sound and he died instantly. Fan Yiweng’s skills were high and when he saw that the palm attacking him was lethal, he used the “Tuo Tian Stance” to block this palm, however it was too strong for him and he felt as though a thousand-jin force had smashed his back, so he saw everything turn black and he collapsed.

Guo Xiang was extremely taken aback and shouted, “They’re my friends! Why did you hit them?”

Fan Yiweng spat out a pool of blood and used his last ounce of strength to get up and pounce on Fawang’s leg, yelling, “Miss, get the hell out of here!” Fawang grabbed his back, wanting to lift him up and smash him down but Fan Yiweng risked his life to protect Guo Xiang, so he grabbed onto Fawang’s leg for all he was worth. Although Fawang was incredibly strong, he could not get rid of him.

Guo Xiang was stunned and furious and immediately knew this monk was a evil man but she did not want to desert Fan Yiweng and escape alone. She placed her hands on her waist and coldly said, "Devil monk, how dare you commit this evil? Let him go, I'll follow you." Fan Yiweng yelled, "Just go! Don't care about..." Before he could say "me" he was dead.

Fawang lifted his body and cast it aside, laughing; "If you want to escape why not use the horse?" Guo Xiang had never hated anyone her whole life, even when Hou Du ambushed and killed Lu Youjiao she just grieved for him but did not hate Hou Du. But now when she saw Fawang being so cruel and brutal she could not help it but hate him and with hatred in her eyes she stared at him. Fawang said, "Miss, aren't you afraid of me?"

Guo Xiang said, "Scared...Of what? If you want to kill me just do it now!"

Fawang stuck out his thumb and said, "Good. A very brave girl, just like her father."

Guo Xiang gazed at him with rage in her eyes and wanted to burry her friends but she did not have any tools so she just carried the bodies and placed them on Fan Yiweng's horse and kicked the horse, saying, "Horse, please take them home." The horse galloped away.

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That night when Yang Guo and Huang Yaoshi left Xiangyang, they used their Qing gong and ran ten li south; before morning they were near Yicheng. They came to a tea house, ordered some dishes and started eating. Huang Yaoshi told him that Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang had been living in their hometown Jiaying in seclusion with Sha Gu for company. He wanted to take them and roam Jianghu to ease

their worries but they did not want to. Yang Guo sadly gave a sigh and reproached himself inwardly.

They drank two cups of wine. Yang Guo said, "Island Master Huang, for these past ten years, I've been looking for you to consult you over a matter."

Huang Yaoshi laughed, "I'm always on the move without a fixed destination, so it was hard for you to find me. But what would you like to ask?" Yang Guo was about to reply when he heard foot steps on the stairs and saw three people coming up.

When Yang Guo and Huang Yaoshi heard the foot steps, they knew the three people's martial arts were strong and recognized two of them after a glance. One was Xiaoxiang Zi, the other was Yin Kexi, but he did not recognize the third person who had a dark complexion. Yin Kexi and Xiaoxiang Zi had seen Yang Guo too and they stood rooted for a moment, then quickly turned around, wanting to get downstairs.

Yang Guo raised his eyebrows and laughed: "We haven't seen each other for a while! Why in such a hurry?"

Yin Kexi raised his hands and greeted him with a smile: "How is everything with you, master Yang?"

Xiaoxiang Zi was still angry about the fact that Yang Guo broke his arm at Mount Zhongnan sixteen years ago. Although his internal strength had increased a lot, he knew he was no match for Yang Guo. He did not bother to look at Yang Guo again and turned around and started to descend the stairs.

The man with the dark face was another famous warrior of Khubilai's; together with Yin Kexi and Xiaoxiang Zi they were here to scout the vicinity. When he saw that Xiaoxiang Zi looking angry, he loudly said: "Brother Xiaoxiang, wait! If

there is a rogue disturbing our mood let me deal with him." He walked over and tried to use his big hand to toss Yang Guo out of the first floor window.

Yang Guo saw that his palm was coloured purple and knew he was trained in the "Poisonous Sand Palms", he thought: "Why don't I use these three men as an excuse to ask Old Master Huang about the Divine Nun of the South Sea?" He saw that the man's hand was about to touch his shoulder, he put up his palm and slapped the man on the cheek. Huang Yaoshi was shocked: "How very fast!" Just by seeing that slap, he knew that Yang Guo had invented his own style and this style was unique. He heard another two slaps, Xiaoxiang Zi was slapped on his left and right cheek. Yang Guo spared Yin Kexi because he had shown some courtesy.

Huang Yaoshi laughed: "Young brother Yang, your newly invented style is most sophisticated. I would like to see the entire set so as to please my eyes."

Yang Guo said: "I was just about to ask Old Master Huang for some pointers." His body rocked about and he was now displaying his "Melancholic Sad Palms", his long sleeve whisked around and his left palm was pushing forward. Suddenly he used the stance "Entangled by the Web of Love" and following he added the technique, "Hesitating on Returning to the Empty Valley", with these two stances he curled Xiaoxiang Zi, Yin Kexi and the other warrior in his waves of palm energy. The three of them were trapped as though in a tidal force and were swaying back and forth; they were totally submissive to Yang Guo's palm. They were nearly unable to stand upright, let alone trying to break free. In a few moments they were at the mercy of Yang Guo. Huang Yaoshi was holding a cup and sighed: "The ancients were drinking wine while reading the Han History Analects; today I am drinking wine and beholding your martial arts. This kind of lofty skill has surpassed the ancients."

Yang Guo said loudly: "Old Master, please give me a few pointers." He waved his palm and Xiaoxiang Zi was pushed towards Huang Yaoshi. Huang Yaoshi did not dare to be leisurely; he pushed out with his left hand and returned Xiaoxiang back to him. He saw that the black-faced warrior was coming towards him now. He first sipped some wine before using his palm to repel that man back too. Yang Guo carefully examined his stances and saw that although his internal power was strong but his techniques were not extraordinarily exquisite. He thought: "If I don't go all out, I cannot force him to display the martial arts of the Divine Nun of the South Sea." He accumulated his energy in his pubic region and increased energy to his palms. That way Xiaoxiang Zi, Yin Kexi and the black-faced warrior were pushed to Huang Yaoshi faster and faster.

After returning a few palms Huang Yaoshi felt that the three men came crashing towards him like tidal waves, the second wave fiercer than the first wave. He thought: "This child's palms become stronger with every stance; he is really one outstanding martial arts master."

At this point the black-faced warrior soared through the sky, his feet first and head back. He was headed towards the face of Huang Yaoshi who tilted his palm to discharge the coming energy force, his right hand trembled a bit and some wine splattered out of the cup. Following were Yin Kexi and Xiaoxiang Zi who were soaring through the air now; one was directly flying towards him the other diagonally. Huang Yaoshi called out: "Good!" he put down his cup and used his right palm to retaliate.

Yang Guo and Huang Yaoshi were now several zhang (1 zhang is about 4 meters) apart from each other, and were exchanging palms with each other. Xiaoxiang Zi, Yin Kexi and the black-faced warrior became, as it were, rubber balls or other toys at the hands of Yang and Huang. They were

entirely in their control and were sent soaring back and forth. Only after displaying half of his “Melancholic Sad Palms”, the “Changing Peach” and “Descending Flower Palms” of Huang Yaoshi were paling in comparison now. When he saw that Yin Kexi was soaring towards him and he figured that his palm energy was not able to resist it. He flicked his finger and a soft splang sound could be heard, a light and delicate energy burst out and countered the energy blast of Yang Guo. He flicked his finger three times and three groups of splangs could be heard; Xiaoxiang Zi, Yin Kexi and the black-faced warrior had fallen on the floor and fainted. His “Divine Flicking Finger” and the “Melancholic Sad Palms” of Yang Guo were evenly well-matched. Neither one was the winner or the loser.

Both of them laughed heartily and sat down at their table again, they were pouring wine and drinking again. Huang Yaoshi said: “Young brother Yang, the power of your newly created palm stances is very forceful. In the entire realm only the “Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms” of my son-in-law, Guo Jing can be compared to it. My “Changing Peach” and “Descending Flower Palms” are one level inferior.”

Yang Guo thanked him repeatedly, then said, “I learned your two great skills “Divine Flicking Finger” and “Jade Flute Swordplay” years ago and when I created this palm skill, I derived some of the essence from your skills. I heard you were once taught by the Divine Nun of the South Sea and learned a palm skill, I would humbly request Elder to display it as an eye-opener for me.”

Huang Yaoshi curiously asked, “Divine Nun of the South Sea? Who’s that? I’ve never heard of such a person.”

Yang Guo’s face turned pale. He stood up and stuttered, “What?! There’s no... no such person as the Divine Nun of the South Sea?”

Huang Yaoshi saw his face change colour and was shocked so he said, "Could it be a young hero who has risen in recent years? This old man is rather ignorant, I've never heard of her."

Yang Guo stood there speechless but his heart was beating wildly, thinking, "Aunt Guo clearly told me Long'er was saved by the Divine Nun of the South Sea, so this whole thing is a lie, this whole thing is a sham to fool me!" He faced the sky and let off a roar which shuddered the whole building, then tears fell to the floor.

Huang Yaoshi said, "If you have any troubles you could tell me, maybe this old man can help you."

Yang Guo said with a trembling voice, "My heart is in a great turmoil. Please pardon me." He waved his sleeve and dashed down the stairs, causing some of the planks to break under his force.

Huang Yaoshi wondered what on Earth was going on and mumbled, "Divine Nun of the South Sea? Who could that be?"

Yang Guo increased his speed and rushed around madly, not eating or sleeping for several days, just charging around like a typhoon. It was only when he became half-dead from fatigue that he thought of Xiao Longnu, not even daring to imagine if he would meet her again. In less than a day he had reached the banks of a large river. Finally he could not take it anymore and just boarded the nearest boat he saw, handed two taels of silver to the boatman and went to sleep without even asking where it was heading.

The boat headed east on the choppy river and stopped every few days to trade goods; it was a trading boat. Yang Guo's heart was still in disarray and did not care where the boat was taking him to; drinking by day and sighing by night,

passing several days in that fashion. The boatman received his money and thought he was just an aimless wanderer and did not bother him.

Then one day a trader on board said the boat was nearing Jiaxing and Lin An. When Yang Guo heard 'Jiaxing', he was surprised, thinking, "My father's death was brought about by Huang Rong years ago at the Iron Spear Temple in Jiaxing and his body was eaten by the crows, but what happened to his bones? I must be a filial son and bury his remains properly." He then got off the boat.

At that time it was the start of winter, and although Jiangnan was not as cold as the north, it was still snowing heavily. Yang Guo put on a cape and started walking. In three days he reached Jiaxing. When he reached there it was evening and he went to a restaurant and ordered some dishes, then asked where the Iron Spear Temple was. He then went out into the snow and went straight there. It was still snowing and the north wind did not show any signs of slackening.

Under the snow's reflection, he saw that this temple has been abandoned for many years and no one tended to its repairs. The door was rotting away and it creaked open when pushed gently. He entered the temple and saw a statue in a bad shape and the place was filled with cobwebs. There was no one around. More than thirty years ago his father died here and he had never seen his father, which made him even sadder.

He looked around the temple and hoped he could find any traces his father had left behind although so many years had passed. He went to the back of the temple and found a grave and a tombstone between two large trees and the tombstone was covered in snow. He brushed the snow away with his sleeve and read the inscription. When he read it he became very angry. It read, "Unfilial Disciple Yang Kang's Grave" and

the sub-heading read, "Inscribed by his Useless Teacher Qiu Chuji".

Yang Guo was furious thinking, "This old priest Qiu Chuji was really heartless; even after my father is dead he wouldn't leave him alone. How was my father unfilial? Humph, what's the bloody use of being filial to that old Cow-nose? If I don't go to the Quanzhen Sect and kill those people, my anger will never subside." He lifted his palm and wanted to smash the tombstone.

Before he could strike, he heard footsteps moving fast outside the temple which sounded strange - they sounded like martial arts experts yet sounded like animals. Yang Guo became curious so he did not strike, then he heard the footsteps heading towards the temple. He quickly got back inside and hid behind the statue, trying to see who it was.

The footsteps came right up to the temple but stopped at the entrance, probably fearing an enemy lying in ambush inside. After a while, they stepped in. Yang Guo peeked at them then almost laughed. He saw four men enter the temple; the four men had their left legs broken, their hands holding a stick and their right legs were clapped in chains; their footsteps made such strange noises because they had to move their feet together.

The leader of the group had a bald and shiny head and only half a left arm. The second person had a lump on his forehead and his left arm stopped at the elbow. The third person was small-sized while the fourth was a huge monk. The four of them looked rather old and were obviously disabled. Yang Guo wondered, "What is their background? Why do they stick together like that and never leave each other?" The leader took out his flint and lit a fire, and then he found a candle and lit it. Yang Guo then saw clearly that apart from the leader, the other three had no eyes in their

eye sockets, then he realized, "So these three people depend on the first person to lead the way."

The bald man held the candle and looked around the temple. The four of them moved like crabs, one following the other and the distance between them was never less than three feet. Yang Guo had concealed himself well. Moreover, these people were disabled and only one of them could see, so they did not find him although their ears were sharp and their movements rather agile. The bald man said, "That old man Ke didn't reveal our whereabouts or invite helpers to lie in ambush here."

The third man said, "Correct, he promised not to inform on us. These people are valiant and always keep their word of honour."

The four people sat on the floor together. The second man said, "Shi Ge (Martial Brother), do you think this old man Ke will really come?"

The first man said, "It's quite hard to say, but I think he won't come. Who's so stupid as to come and seek death?"

The third man said, "But this old man Ke was the head of the Jiangnan Seven Freaks. That year he made a bet with that scoundrel priest Qiu and so he went all the way to Mongolia to teach Guo Jing martial arts. This matter is well-known in Jianghu. Everyone says the Jiangnan Seven Freaks never went back on their word. It's because of this that we released him."

Yang Guo heard every word clearly from behind the statue and thought, "So they're waiting for Elder Ke." Then he heard the second man say, "I say he'll definitely come. Brother Peng, why don't we make a bet to see who..." Before he finished talking, they heard footsteps out in the snow which were heavy and light alternately – someone was using a

walking staff. Yang Guo knew Ke Zhen'E when he was on Peach Blossom Island, so he knew it was him immediately. The skinny man laughed, "Brother Hou, that old man Ke is here, you still want to bet?" The man with the lump said, "You scoundrel, are you really not afraid of death?"

A few tapping sounds were heard and the Flying Bat Ke Zhen'E walked in and said, "Ke Zhen'E has kept his word and has come. These are the "Nine Flower Jade Dew Pills", altogether there are twelve of them, which makes it three for each of you." He threw a small bottle over to the bald man. He said happily, "Many thanks." and caught it. Ke Zhen'E said, "This old man has completed his business and is here to die." He was standing erect proudly in front of them and his beard was floating in the wind.

The man with the lump said, "Shi Ge, he brought us the "Nine Flower Jade Dew Pills" which can treat our internal injuries, moreover we don't have any deep feud with him, let's just let him go."

The skinny man laughed, "Hey, Brother Hou, don't let the tiger escape back into the wild. Your kindness may cause us to die a horrible death. Although he hasn't revealed our secret, how can we be sure he'd never do it?" He shouted, "Let's act together!" The four people rushed over and surrounded Ke Zhen'E.

The old man said hoarsely, "More than thirty years ago, all of us witnessed Yang Kang's tragic death here, who knew it would happen to you too; this is retribution."

Ke Zhen'E smashed his walking staff on the floor and said angrily, "That Yang Kang acknowledged a scoundrel as his step-father and betrayed his country for wealth; he was a despicable animal. I, Ke Zhen'E, am a true man who has never let down the sky or the Earth, how can you compare that traitor with me, the Flying Bat? You know you can kill me

but you cannot insult me (Ke Sha Bu Ke Ru - A rather common phrase at that time)!"

The skinny man sneered, "You're about to die and you still try to be a hero!" Three of them shot out their palms together and aimed at his head. Ke Zhen'E knew he was not their match and just stood there, not attempting any retaliation or defense.

Suddenly a gust of wind blew over them and a 'peng' sound was heard, causing the dust to fly. The four of them knew something was wrong and felt as if they did not hit any flesh. That bald man understood what was going on but Ke Zhen'E had suddenly disappeared and in his position was the statue. The statue's head was smashed and fell into pieces under the four people's combined force.

The bald man was shocked. He turned around and saw a thirty-something year old man with a furious face holding Ke Zhen'E's neck and lifting him high into the air, shouting, "Why did you insult my father?"

Ke Zhen'E asked, "Who're you?"

Yang Guo said, "I'm Yang Guo and Yang Kang was my father. When I was young you didn't treat me badly but why do you slander my late father behind my back?"

Ke Zhen'E coldly said, "There are many men in history, some leave a good reputation for a hundred generations, while some leave behind a stinking name. How can you silence everyone?"

Yang Guo saw that he was very stubborn and became more furious and threw him down hard onto the floor, shouting, "So you're saying my father was despicable and shameless?"

The bald man saw that Yang Guo's martial arts were superb since he could swap a person with a statue without even him

knowing. He knew he was not his match and lightly tugged at the chain, wanting the group to sneak out of the temple. Yang Guo darted forward and blocked the exit, saying, "No one's getting out of here alive without giving me an explanation." The four people yelled and threw out a palm each towards him. Yang Guo said, "Good!" He also shot out his left palm and the force of a tornado smashed onto them, causing them to lose their balance and fall backwards, hitting the statue and smashing it. The second man's skills were the weakest and his lump hit right smack into the statue, causing him to black out immediately.

Yang Guo said, "Who are you people? Why are you chained together in this strange manner? And why do you want to meet Ke Zhen'E here?" After being hit by Yang Guo's palm, his chest became congested and his organs seemed to turn upside down, so he sat quietly for a while trying to circulate his chi before talking slowly.

This bald man was Sha Tongtian, the second man was his martial brother the Three Headed Serpent Hou Tonghai, the third man was the Thousand Hand Killer Peng Lianhu, the fourth was the Big Handprint Lama Ling Zi. More than 30 years ago, the Old Urchin Zhou Botong captured them and handed them to Qiu Chuji and Wang Chuyi who imprisoned them in Chongyang Palace, wanting them to repent before releasing them. But their evil characters were hard to change and they tried many ways and means to escape but were recaptured each time. On their third attempt, Hou Tonghai, Peng Lianhu and Ling Zi killed several of the Quanzhen disciples who were their wardens. The Quanzhen Taoists punished them by breaking their legs and blinding them. Since only Sha Tongtian had killed no one, he was not blinded. Then sixteen years ago the Mongolians overran Chongyang Palace and they managed to escape. However, since three of them were blind, they had to rely on Sha Tongtian to lead the way, but they were afraid that he would

desert them, they had chained themselves up in this manner. At that time Yang Guo only spent a short time at Chongyang Palace and was not in his master's and fellow disciples' good books. He had never been allowed to go near their cell; therefore he had never seen them and did not know their backgrounds.

When they escaped from Chongyang Palace the four of them were disabled so they could not fight the Quanzhen disciples. Although the Quanzhen's base had been destroyed, their strength in Jianghu had not diminished. They came to Jiangnan and lived in a deserted village, passing sixteen years uneventfully. But one day they came out and saw Ke Zhen'E passing along on a small road. Sha Tongtian was afraid he had come for them so they went to confront him. Ke Zhen'E's skills were no match for the four people and he was subdued almost immediately. After interrogating him, they found he was attending to some other matters. Although the four of them had no feud with him, they were afraid he would leak out their secret so they wanted to kill him.

Ke Zhen'E swore that he would make a trip to Jiaying to attend to a matter then he would return to seek death, promising that if they let him off for the time being he would obtain the "Nine Flower Jade Dew Pills" from Peach Blossom Island to return the favour. After their legs were broken, they would ache and hurt whenever it rained. When they heard he would bring them such an effective treatment, they made him swear an oath not to reveal their whereabouts and not to get help to fight them and finally to meet at the Iron Spear Temple.

When Sha Tongtian finished his story, he said, "Hero Yang, when your father was still alive we were guests in his palace. We never did anything against him until he passed away. We hope that you consider our good ties with him and let us off." Many years ago these four people were outstanding people in

Jianghu; even if they were threatened by swords and axes they would never be willing to show any weakness. After being disabled and suffering many years of hardship, they discarded their pride and begged Yang Guo for mercy.

Yang Guo snorted and did not bother with them. Facing Ke Zhen'E he said, "So you went to see Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang? What was it about?"

Ke Zhen'E faced the sky and laughed, "Yang Guo ah Yang Guo, you're really ignorant."

Yang Guo angrily said, "In what way?"

Ke Zhen'E said, "At this stage, I already ignore my old life; even when I was in my prime I have never been intimidated by anyone. No matter how good your martial arts are, you can only frighten people who're afraid of death. The Jiangnan Seven Freaks never submit under interrogation."

Yang Guo saw that his manner was imposing and gallant and he respected him. He said, "Elder Ke, I'm at fault, pardon me. I was offended because you insulted my father. Elder Ke's name is well-known throughout the world; I have admired you since young and do not dare offend you."

Ke Zhen'E said, "This is more like it. I heard your character is good and you contributed greatly to Xiangyang, so I regard you as an outstanding person. If you were like your father, by just talking to me you would have insulted me."

Yang Guo's anger erupted again and he shouted, "What on Earth had my father done? Tell me clearly." Among all the people Yang Guo knew, there were many who knew about his father but no one wanted to tell him the whole story in order not to offend him. Even if he asked, they just picked some unrelated details and told him those.

Ke Zhen'E bore a deep grudge against his father and he also did not have any regard for his own life, so he did not care if Yang Guo was offended or not. He told Yang Guo the whole story of Guo Jing and Yang Kang and mentioned how Yang Kang collaborated with Ouyang Feng to kill five of the Jiangnan Seven Freaks. He finally told how he died after striking Huang Rong here in this very temple. Then he said, "These people witnessed everything that happened that night. Sha Tongtian, Peng Lianhu, tell us, have I spoken the truth?"

The six people had smashed the statue and shouted loudly, frightening the crows on the roof of the temple. They circled in the air and cawed continuously. Sha Tongtian sighed, "That night there were so many crows as well... My hand was scratched by the elder Master Yang, if not for Brother Peng's quick reaction of cutting off my arm, how could I still be alive today?" Peng Lianhu said, "Old man Ke is more or less correct, but Hero Yang's father treated us with courtesy and he was really... really outstanding and talented." [Some background information: In 'The Legend of the Eagle Shooting Heroes', Yang Kang struck the spot on Huang Rong's Soft Armour which had Ouyang Feng's poison on it. As a result he eventually died from the poison; when he scratched Sha Tongtian the poison was spread to him, so his arm had to be amputated.]

Yang Guo held his head with both hands in grief and indignation – he never expected his father to be such an evil traitor. No matter how great he had become, it was hard to erase his father's bad name. The six people sat there silently while the crows continued cawing.

After a long time, Ke Zhen'E said, "Master Yang, you have contributed greatly at Xiangyang; no matter how many wrongdoings your father committed, you have already made

up for him. Even in the Underworld he would be proud of you.”

Yang Guo thought back to his relationship with the Guo couple and remembered how Huang Rong did not trust him. Many of the misunderstandings in the past resulted from this. But without his father how would he be here? Still, many of his problems originated from his father, so he gave a long sigh and asked Ke Zhen'E, “Elder Ke, how are Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang?”

Ke Zhen'E said, “They heard about how you burned the supplies at Nanyang and how you annihilated the Mongolian vanguard, so they were delighted. They asked every detail about you and also asked if you had news of Xiao Longnu. They really miss you a lot, but it's a pity I don't know much myself.”

Yang Guo said, “I've not seen my two sworn sisters for sixteen years.” Suddenly he turned around and told Sha Tongtian, “Elder Ke has promised to give his life to you, he is a man of honour and never goes back on his word. Now you can act. If you gang up on him you can win by numbers and kill him. But if you do that I will kill you dogs to avenge him.”

They sat wordlessly for a while. Then Peng Lianhu said, “The four of us are really foolish and we offended old Hero Ke; we beg you two great men to forgive us.”

Yang Guo said, “Then remember that now it is you who must keep your word and do not dare kill Elder Ke.”

Peng Lianhu said, “Yes, yes. Old Hero Ke is a man of honor, we really admire him.”

Yang Guo said, “Then leave quickly. Don't cause me trouble again.” The four men bowed together and left the temple. Yang Guo saved Ke Zhen'E's life as well as defended his

honor, so he was really grateful. The two men kicked away the broken pieces of the statue and sat down.

Ke Zhen'E said, "Actually I came to Jiaying because of the younger Miss Guo."

Yang Guo was slightly surprised, asking, "What happened to her?"

Ke Zhen'E sighed but smiled, "Each of Guo Jing's daughters are mischievous in their own way, which really causes a lot of headaches. No one knows why that girl Guo Xiang left Xiangyang without saying a word and no one knows where she is. Her father, in his anxiety, sent out people to find her whereabouts, but so far she can not be traced. Some of them actually came to Peach Blossom Island to look for her. But why would such an active young girl come to Peach Blossom Island to keep this blind old man company? I also became worried and came here to help find her."

Yang Guo said, "So have you got any news?"

Ke Zhen'E said, "Yesterday I was at Linan and I heard two Mongols saying that Hero Guo's daughter had been captured and imprisoned in the Mongolian Camp..."

Yang Guo exclaimed, "Ah! Is this true?"

Ke Zhen'E said, "The two Mongolian armies have come to attack Xiangyang, yet the Imperial Court's officials still think they can make peace. These two Mongols must be here to fool our officials, so their ranks must be very high. I lived with the Mongolians for many years and although I'm blind my ears are very sharp so I heard it very clearly."

Yang Guo said, "So this is true?"

Ke Zhen'E said, "Yes! I originally wanted to send poison to those two Mongolians, but reporting the matter to Xiangyang

is more urgent so I didn't want to be stuck with this problem. Unfortunately I met those four criminals along the way. I don't really care when I die but the news concerning Guo Xiang must be reported. I requested several days' grace and came to Jiaxing to relay the news to Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang. After receiving the news they went north immediately, and so I came to seek death. I never expected that I would keep my promise while those four scum didn't, Ha-ha-ha!"

Yang Guo remained quiet for some time before asking, "Elder Ke, did you happen to overhear where Miss Guo is held? Is her life in danger?"

Ke Zhen'E said, "They didn't mention it; from what I heard it seems like those two Mongols aren't too sure themselves."

Yang Guo said, "This is really urgent, I must rush there and conduct a rescue operation. Elder Ke, please take your time."

Ke Zhen'E heard from the Beggar Clan members who came to Peach Blossom Island to look for Guo Xiang and talk about Yang Guo's great deeds at Xiangyang, so he knew that he was exceptionally capable. He said, "With you going, I don't have to worry."

Yang Guo said, "Elder Ke, I'd like to ask for a favour – please help honor my father and erect a new tombstone which says, 'My Father Lord Yang Kang's Grave, by his unfilial son Yang Guo'."

Ke Zhen'E was surprised then he realized what he wanted, saying, "Absolutely right! Although you're unfilial, being unfilial has far surpassed others being filial. I'll definitely do it."

Yang Guo went back to Jiaxing and bought three good horses and set off towards the north immediately. Throughout the

entire journey he kept switching horses to prevent any delays and he reached the Mongolian camp the same day.

The Mongolian Khan was trying to capture Xiangyang but they had suffered two great defeats without knowing why. Furthermore their supplies at Nanyang were burned completely and they lost many soldiers. Their morale was low and they did not know the real situation of the Song soldiers. So they camped in the north of Nanyang and did not stir. Their flags were all over the place and their weapons were displayed for all to see. Yang Guo swept across the camp with his eyes and saw tent after tent, seemingly unending.

Yang Guo waited for nightfall and snuck into the camp to scout around. He only saw that their weapons were neatly arranged and the whole camp was in order; this would be really serious for the Song army. Yang Guo knew there were many great fighters in the camp and he could not fight them all so he was careful not to reveal himself. After sneaking around for half a night he still could not find out where Guo Xiang was held. He managed to capture an advisor who spoke Mandarin and interrogated him, but the advisor claimed he had not even heard of the matter at all.

Yang Guo was still worried and he examined the camp for a few days. Finally he determined that she was not in the camp and thought, "It looks like Uncle Guo has already rescued her or perhaps those two Mongol officials had just heard some rumors." Then after checking the dates he found that it was nearing his reunion with Xiao Longnu, so he hurriedly headed towards the Passionless Valley.

End of Chapter 37.

Chapter 38 - Life and Death Are Boundless

Translated by Frans Soetomo with excerpt by Athena



Suddenly he jumped up and ran toward the Heartbreaking Cliff. He stood in front of the carved letters, and loudly shouted, "This is your own handwriting. Why didn't you keep your promise?" His voice was very loud, it echoed on the surrounding mountains, "Why didn't you keep your promise? Why didn't you keep your promise?...you keep your promise?...keep your promise?"

When Guo Xiang saw Jinlun Fawang ruthlessly kill the Long Beard Ghost and the Big Head Ghost her heart was filled with sorrow; yet she knew it would be impossible to get away from his vicious hands, so she said, "Quickly kill me, what are you waiting for?"

Fawang laughed, "Killing a cute girl like you is too easy. But I have killed two men, and that's enough for today. I'll deal with you after a few days. For now just follow me." Guo Xiang knew fighting him would be futile, she thought she'd better follow him and wait for a good opportunity to escape. So she just made faces at him, stuck her tongue out and unhurriedly mounted the horse.

Fawang was very pleased, he silently thought, "The Emperor wanted to have Guo Jing's life at all costs, but has never been able to succeed. Today I caught Guo Jing's beloved daughter; he could be forced to surrender. If Guo Jing is not willing to surrender, we will just torture the girl below the city wall; that way Guo Jing's mind will be disturbed so that Xiangyang's defenses will be weakened."

That evening they stopped by an empty house along their way. The people had left the area early on; all the villages were desolate. They were fortunate to find a house with its four walls intact. Jinlun Fawang gave his dried biscuits to Guo Xiang, and then let the girl sleep inside a room while he sat meditating in the main hall.

Guo Xiang was tossing and turning; how could she sleep well? Around midnight she heard Fawang's snore, she took a peek and saw him sitting against the wall. She was delighted. Carefully she opened the window and snuck out. She then tore her robe into four pieces, with which she wrapped her horse's hoofs. Then she walked her horse carefully away. After about half a 'li' (about $\frac{1}{4}$ km) she did not see Fawang following, so she mounted the horse and galloped to the northwest. She thought that when Fawang awoke; he would think Guo Xiang was running south, back to Xiangyang. The horse ran for about an hour then slowed down because of fatigue. She often looked back, still no Fawang in sight. She kept moving for about fifty or sixty li, and only then did she feel relieved.

Guo Xiang arrived at a little pathway going up a small hill. She followed that path going higher and higher. The path was turning in front of her, when, out of the blue, she heard somebody snoring very loudly like the rumble of thunder. She saw somebody was sleeping across the path in front of her and she almost fell off the horse's back! It was Jinlun Fawang, with his baldhead and yellow robe. She turned her horse around and galloped downhill as fast as her horse could carry her, this time toward the southeast. She looked back and saw Fawang was still sleeping soundly.

A moment later she got to a small forest, with a lot of trees. Again, she was shocked! A man was hanging by his feet from a tree branch. Who else if not Jinlun Fawang? By now she was enraged. Jinlun Fawang was looking at her and laughed mockingly.

"If you want to capture me, just do it! Why would you play a crazy game like this?" she said. She charged her horse toward him, and suddenly swung her whip toward the monk's face. Her horse leaped forward at the same time so that they passed the monk. Then she tried to pull her whip back, but

she felt a strong force pulling her in the opposite direction; her body was lifted up from the saddle. When the whip was lashing toward Fawang, the monk opened his mouth and bit it, he then pulled the whip and Guo Xiang was pulled towards him.

Airborne, Guo Xiang did not panic; she saw Fawang stoop to snatch her, and deliberately let go of the whip so that she fell down. Fawang was shocked, he thought she was too weak to hold on to the whip and that's why she fell. Immediately he jumped down and readied himself to catch her. "Watch out!" he said.

"Aiyo!" Guo Xiang pretended to be hurt. Her body was only two feet away from the monk. Suddenly she exerted her energy and threw both hands toward the monk's chest in rapid succession. 'Bang! Bang!' Fawang fell down and looked to her like he'd fainted. Even though Fawang's skill was high, he had not expected Guo Xiang would launch a sneak attack like that.

Guo Xiang was delighted; it was better than what she had expected. Quickly she lifted up a big rock to smash his baldhead. But she had never killed anybody in her life before. True, this monk had killed two of her friends, but still she did not have a heart to kill him. Finally she put the stone down, and thrust her fingers out to seal Fawang's accupoints: 'heavenly support' [tian ding] on his neck, and 'body pillar' [shen zhu] on his back. Then she sealed 'divine grace' [shen feng] on his chest, 'crystal cold abyss' [qing leng yuan] on his arm, 'windy city' [feng shi] on his leg and few others. In one breath her hands moved rapidly, sealing a total of thirteen accupoints. She was not satisfied yet. She lifted four heavy stones, of about a dozen jins each, and placed them on top of Fawang's body.

“Wicked man...Oh, wicked man!” she said, “Today your Miss does not want to kill you, but remember that you should repent and not hurt anybody anymore.” Then she mounted her horse ready to leave.

Jinlun Fawang suddenly opened up his eyes, looked at her and laughed, “Little Miss, you have a very kind heart,” he said, “This old monk likes you very much!”

While he was still talking, the four stones on his body suddenly flew up and fell crashing down with a loud noise, while the monk himself leaped up. Somehow he managed to unseal his own thirteen accupoints. Guo Xiang was so startled that she froze.

Fawang indeed was hit by Guo Xiang, but he wasn't injured. The martial arts level between them was like heaven and earth. Fawang only pretended to fall down and faint. He was curious as to what Guo Xiang would do to him. He let his accupoints be sealed and even let Guo Xiang place big stones on his body. He thought, “This child has a kind heart, much better than my two disciples. She is perfect.” Right then and there he decided to take Guo Xiang as his disciple.

Jinlun Fawang had three disciples. His first disciple was well versed in martial arts and literature. He was very talented and Fawang had intended to make him his successor. It's a pity he died very young. His second disciple, Da'erba, was naïve and simple; his talent was just average. His third disciple was Prince Hou Dou; he had an ill character and moreover, he betrayed his master and martial brother. Fawang was disappointed. He had reached the pinnacle of martial arts. He was a monk, therefore, no children. The only way he could pass on his skill was by taking on disciples. If not, in a hundred years, wouldn't his exquisite martial arts vanish? Therefore, seeing Guo Xiang was talented and kind hearted, he immediately made a decision to take her as his

successor. He did not care if Guo Xiang was his enemy's daughter. Wasn't she still young and innocent? He was certain that eventually he would be able to shape her character. Because of this thought he gave up his original plan of torturing Guo Xiang and disturbing Guo Jing's mind.

Guo Xiang stared at the monk. His eyes rolled, his mouth shut. She dismounted her horse and came near him.

"Old Monk," she said, "your skill is very high, it's a pity you have a wicked heart."

"If you admire my skill," said the monk, laughing, "take me as your master. I'll teach you everything I know."

"Pfft!" Guo Xiang snickered, "Why would I learn a Monk's skill? I don't want to be a nun!"

Fawang laughed. "How could learning my skills make you a nun?" he said, "You have sealed my accupoints, I unsealed them myself. You put stones on me, those stones flew up. You have run away riding a horse, but I could sleep in front of your horse! Don't you think all those skills are worth learning?"

Guo Xiang knew the monk was highly skilled, but she also knew he was ruthless. How could she take him as her master? Besides, she was busy looking for Yang Guo. She didn't want to waste any time chitchatting with the monk. So she shook her head.

"Even if you have a higher skill, I still don't want to take a wicked man like you as my master!" she honestly said.

"Uh, how would you know I am a wicked man?" asked Fawang.

"You easily killed the Long Beard Ghost and Big Head Ghost! They were not even your enemies, why did you kill them?"

Fawang laughed. "Don't take me wrong!" he said, "I was just helping you to get a horse. They were the ones who attacked me first! Didn't you see? If my skill was low, wouldn't I be dead at their hands? A monk has to have a benevolent heart; he would not kill if the situation were not pressing ..."

"Hmm!" Guo Xiang snickered. She didn't want to believe him. "What kind a person are you? If you were a good person, you would let me go."

"Didn't I let you go?" the monk countered. "You had a horse and you were free to go to the east or west. I was just sleeping on the road! I didn't even touch you!"

"If that's the case, then let me go looking for Brother Yang. Don't you say another word!" she said.

"Oh, I can't do that!" Fawang shook his head. "You have to take me as your master; you'll have to be under my tutelage for twenty years. After that, you are free to look for anybody you wish."

Guo Xiang was upset. "Old Monk, you don't have any manners! I don't want to take you as my master! Why do you force me?"

"You are the one who doesn't have any manners!" said the monk. "Where in the world could you find a highly skilled master like me? Although other people begged and kowtowed to me three hundred times, I did not take them as disciples. On the other hand, you have found a very good opportunity, a once in a thousand years opportunity, but you refused it. Aren't you the eccentric one?"

"Shameless! You are shameless!" Guo Xiang stuck her tongue out and put her fingers on her cheeks. "Who said you are a highly skilled master? You can't even overcome me, a teenage girl. What's wrong with you? Can you defeat my

father and mother? Can you defeat my grandfather, the Old Master Huang? Let's not talk about father or mother or grandfather, you can't even defeat my Brother Yang Guo! Huh!"

"Who said that?" shouted Fawang. "Who said I couldn't defeat that kid Yang Guo?"

"Everybody in the world did!" answered Guo Xiang. "Just a few days ago we had a Heroes Summit at Xiangyang. Everybody said that even three Jinlun Fawangs could not possibly defeat the one-armed Eagle Hero Yang Guo!"

Actually, Guo Xiang was just rambling on to provoke Fawang's anger. The Heroes Summit only discussed the defense of Xiangyang and strategies to fight the Mongolians. Even if someone did actually mention Fawang and Yang Guo, how would she know? She wasn't even in attendance. But her words were right on Fawang's sore spot; the fact was, that more than ten years ago, Fawang was defeated by Yang Guo. Therefore, Fawang was livid!

"If Yang Guo were here," he said loud and angry, "I would give him a lesson in the 'Dragon and Elephant Wisdom Dexterity Technique'. I want him to suffer very badly, so that the world will know who is better, Yang Guo or me."

"You know Yang Guo is not here, therefore you dare to boast!" said Guo Xiang, provokingly. "Do you have the guts to find him and fight? Your skill, the 'Snake and Pig Clumsy Technique'... "

"That's the 'Dragon and Elephant Wisdom Dexterity Technique'!" Fawang cut her off. He was so upset his 'Dragon and Elephant Wisdom Dexterity Technique' became 'Snake and Pig Clumsy Technique' ... Of course he was furious.

"If you can beat Brother Yang Guo, then it is 'Dragon and Elephant'," said Guo Xiang. "Otherwise, if you are beaten in just one stance, you are no more than 'Snake and Pig'! If you can defeat Brother Yang Guo, you won't have to force me, I will come and beg you to be my master ... Only I know for sure that you are afraid to go and find Brother Yang. So let's not waste our breath here! I am sure you will run with your tail between your legs as soon as you see even his shadow!"

Fawang was not stupid. He knew the girl was just trying to inflame his anger, but he was a proud man. The only disgrace in his life was his defeat by Yang Guo. Now that he had mastered the tenth level of the 'Dragon and Elephant Wisdom Dexterity Technique', fighting Yang Guo was at the top of his list. Therefore, hearing Guo Xiang, he said with confidence, "When I told you I knew where he was, I was just deceiving you. Too bad I don't know his whereabouts. If I did, I would certainly find him. I will beat him and make him kowtow to me begging for mercy!"

Guo Xiang clapped her hands, she laughed mockingly. "O monk, a liar monk!" she shouted. "You are boasting yourself as a valiant man with unmatched in skills; but as soon as you see Yang Guo come from the east, you will certainly run to the west!"

"Pei!" Fawang spat, seething with anger.

"Even though I have no idea where Brother Yang Guo is right now, I do know where he will be in about a month," said Guo Xiang.

"Where will he be?" asked Fawang.

"Why would I tell you? You are scared of him anyway! Forget it! It will only cause nightmares and your heart will be troubled."

Fawang was so angry that he gnashed his teeth. "Tell me ... tell me!" he barked.

"He is going to the Passionless Valley!" Guo Xiang explained. "He is going to the Broken Heart Cliff! He will meet with Xiao Longnu, his wife. One Yang Guo will scare the hell out of you; if he is with Xiao Longnu ... hey ... hey ... Ah old monk, why do you want to go to the Broken Heart Cliff just to be beaten to death?"

For more than ten years Fawang had trained his new skill, the 'Dragon and Elephant Wisdom Dexterity Technique'. He wanted to test this new skill against the 'Jade Maiden Sword Technique' of the Yang-Long couple. He felt that his training was complete, at least enough to fight the couple. He had sworn not to set his foot on the central plains again if he could not defeat the couple. Therefore, Guo Xiang's speech was again on target. Out of anger he laughed.

"All right, fine. Let us leave for the Passionless Valley right now," he said, "but what if I can defeat both Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu?"

"If you really are any good, why wouldn't I take you as my master?" countered the girl. "Only thing is, the Passionless Valley is so remote and difficult to find ..."

"Don't you worry!" laughed Fawang. "I know that place, I've been there. It's still early; you follow me to the camp. I have some business to attend to. I'll take you to the Passionless Valley afterward."

Hearing this, Guo Xiang was relieved. She thought, "I was afraid you wouldn't want to go. Now that you want to, why should I be worried? O monk, you may be arrogant, you may be highly skilled, but just wait till you meet Brother Yang!" Thus she followed the monk to the Mongolian camp without hesitation.

Fawang was determined to take Guo Xiang as his disciple; he wanted her to inherit all his skills. And since he had to win her heart first, he treated Guo Xiang with utmost courtesy and respect. It is difficult to find a good master in the martial world; but it is equally difficult to find a talented disciple. Along the way Fawang found out that Guo Xiang was really smart and talented, therefore, he was more and more delighted.

Guo Xiang often chided him for killing the Long Beard Ghost and the Big Head Ghost; but Fawang wasn't unhappy, on the contrary, he praised her for having a benevolent heart, unlike his own ruthless Hou Dou.

Fawang took Guo Xiang to the Mongolian camp, the one where Khubilai - the Emperor's cousin, was. It was the southern camp; while the one Yang Guo investigated was the northern one - where the Mengke Khan was. The two officials who were overheard by Ke Zhen'E spoke in general term, while Ke Zhen'E himself was not aware that there were two different camps. Thus Yang Guo's search was in vain.

Actually Fawang and Guo Xiang left for the Passionless Valley not too long after Yang Guo, but because Yang Guo was in haste, the distance between them was more than a hundred li. This made Yang Guo arrive at the Passionless Valley a few days earlier than they did.

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In Xiangyang, Guo Jing and Huang Rong were so worried about their daughter. They have dispatched dozens of Beggar Clan disciples to try to find her. They came back in a few days with a unanimous report: no trace of Guo Xiang.

After about ten days, Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang arrived in Xiangyang. They brought news from Ke Zhen'E that Guo Xiang was captured and brought to the Mongolian camp. Guo

Jing and Huang Rong were very shocked! That night Huang Rong and Cheng Ying went to the enemy's camp. But just like Yang Guo, they did not find anything. On the third night they were sighted; which resulted in a battle with the Mongolian officers. They were surrounded by more than forty soldiers, but with their swords' help, they would escape and get back home to Xiangyang.

Huang Rong was baffled. She believed Guo Xiang was not inside the Mongolian camp. But since there was no other news, she became more worried than ever. She discussed this situation with Guo Jing. They decided since there was no sign of Mongolian troop movement yet, that Huang Rong should go and search for Guo Xiang. She would take their two white eagles, with the intention of using them as couriers later on.

Lu Wushuang and Cheng Ying immediately expressed their intentions of coming along with Huang Rong. She quickly agreed, since they would be valuable helpers. They came out of Xiangyang, went around the enemy's camp, and went northwest. Their destination was Fenglingdu. Huang Rong thought, "This time Xiang'er's intention is to find Yang Guo, and since they first met around a ferry crossing in Tongguan, perhaps we will find some clues around that place."

This journey took place in the winter. They proceeded slowly because they needed to ask people along the way about Guo Xiang. It was already toward the end of the second month when they finally arrived at Fenglingdu; the ice had already melted. There again they asked lots of people that might have seen Guo Xiang: the peddlers, cart drivers, restaurant workers, and anybody who would possibly see somebody fitting Guo Xiang's description. But so far the result was negative.

"Shi Jie (older martial sister), don't you worry," Cheng Ying tried to console Huang Rong. "Xiang'er is a very lucky girl.

Just remember the day she was born; she was fought over by Jinlun Fawang and Li Mochou, both were the epitome of evil. Didn't somebody say that if someone survives a grave danger, one would be lucky all one's life? She was in grave danger then, and she survived. So I believe she will survive now."

Huang Rong sighed, but didn't say anything.

The three of them left Fenglingdu and headed out of town. The sun was shining, the weather was getting warmer, and they could feel the southerly breeze. Spring was coming. Cheng Ying was trying to entertain Huang Rong. She pointed to a flower bush and said, "Shi Jie, here in the north the spring comes much later. Just look at these peach blossom buds. Aren't they already blooming on the Peach Blossom Island? I think they may even have sprouted some fruits already." She picked a peach blossom, played with it and softly singing, "I ask the flower, but I have no answer. Why do flowers fall? Why do they bloom? A third part for the spring, the other third float on the water, and the rest fall back to the earth ..."

Huang Rong gazed at Miss Cheng. She was beautiful, just like Huang Rong always remembered her. She recalled how Cheng Ying lived a quiet life and couldn't help but feeling sad for her. She was still daydreaming when suddenly her ears caught a buzzing noise. It was a big honey bee. It flew around the peach blossom in Cheng Ying's hand, and then landed on another flower, gathering nectar. That bee was gray and bigger than average bees. Suddenly a thought flashed in her mind.

"This bee looks like Xiao Longnu's Jade Bees. How come it is here?" she asked no one in particular.

"You are right," said Wushuang. "Let us follow this bee. See where the beehive is ..."

That bee flew around the flower bushes, and finally flew toward the northwest. The three of them used their lightness kungfu to follow. The bee flew and landed on some other flowers along the way. Not too long afterwards they saw two other bees. Near dusk they arrived at a very beautiful valley. The trees were green and the mountains looked purple. It was a captivating scene. Toward the hillside there hung seven or eight beehives made of wood. Those three bees flew into one of the hives.

On the other side of the hill they saw three thatched huts. There were two small foxes playing around in front of the house, their eyes gazed toward the visitors. About that time the middle door swung open, and out came an old man with a very healthy countenance, his face so fresh like that of a young boy.

Seeing this old man, Huang Rong was thrilled. "Old Urchin, look who's here! Look here!"

That old man was indeed Zhou Botong. He lifted his head, laughing heartily and started running toward Huang Rong. But after only a few steps he stopped abruptly. He blushed, turned around and ran fast to the house; 'bang!' he slammed the door shut!

Huang Rong was surprised; she had no idea why he behaved peculiarly. She came to the door and banged it. "Old Urchin... Old Urchin!" she called, "There are guests coming from afar, why are you hiding?" Huang Rong kept banging the door, but Botong shouted, "No! I am not going to open the door!"

"Are you sure?" Huang Rong chuckled. "I am going to light a fire, I am going to burn your dog house down to ashes!"

Huang Rong was just shutting her mouth up when suddenly the door on the left opened, out came a smiling monk who

said, "To this remote hill and quiet forest came honorable guests. The old monk welcomes you!"

Huang Rong turned around and saw Reverend Yideng was smiling sweetly, his hands clasped in respect. Quickly she came over and bowed to him.

"Ah, turns out the Venerable Monk and Old Urchin are neighbors!" she said, chuckling. "It really is beyond my expectations! But why did Old Urchin close his door and refuse to welcome his guests?"

Reverend Yideng laughed. "Don't mind him!" he said, "Please come into my hut, I will serve you tea."

Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang came and paid their respects, expressing their gratitude they went inside the Reverend's hut.

Yideng immediately served them tea. Huang Rong asked of his well-being since the last time they met.

"Madam Guo, can you guess who lives in the other hut?" he asked, smiling.

Huang Rong thought for a moment. She wondered why the Old Urchin's behavior was so strange. Then she laughed and recited this poem, 'In the deepest of dawn's cold, when the green spring grass ripples, standing face to face taking a bath wearing red clothes.' Good! Very good!" The 'In the deepest of dawn's cold' was part of 'si zhang ji' [four looms/weaving machines] poem written by Concubine Liu Yinggu many years ago.

Reverend Yideng laughed heartily. His heart was free; he did not concern himself with past matters. He clapped his hands and said, "Madam Guo is very smart, I did not expect you to guess correctly!" And then he walked to the door and called,

“Yinggu, Yinggu, come over here, come meet our old friends!”

A moment later, Yinggu came over with a wooden tray in her hands, full with green fruits and honey.

Huang Rong and her company quickly bowed in respect, and then the five of them sat and talked happily. Didn't old acquaintances gather together?

Huang Rong was very happy. For a long, long time, the three were involved with love, hatred and revenge. But now Zhou Botong, Reverend Yideng and Yinggu had set aside their differences, opened their hearts and made peace with each other. They spent their sunset years living together in this beautiful valley, the 'Hundred-Flower Valley' [wan hua gu]. They became beekeepers, did some gardening, and even worked a rice field. But the Old Urchin was embarrassed, that was the reason he hid himself. Still, he could not resist listening to their conversation. He eavesdropped from his room. He heard Huang Rong's narration of the Heroes Summit at Xiangyang, the festivities, everything, until she came to the part where Prince Hou Dou's disguise was uncovered. She deliberately changed the subject and continued. Zhou Botong could not resist hearing everything. He opened his door and came barging in.

“And then what?” he asked impatiently, “Did Hou Dou run away?”

They laughed. The conversation became more and more animated!

That night the guests slept in Yinggu's hut. The next morning Huang Rong woke up early and went outside; she saw Zhou Botong was dancing around like crazy, a big bee in his hand.

“Hey, Old Urchin, what are you doing?” Huang Rong asked, chuckling. “You look extremely happy.”

“Hey, Little Huang Rong, my skill is getting better by the day,” came the answer, “Will you or won’t you admire me?”

Huang Rong knew this old man very well; his two traits were: first, he loved to fool around; second, he was crazy about martial arts. After living alone in this remote area for more than ten years, it could be that he had improved his martial arts considerably, or it could be that he had invented some new and weird stances. She remembered his ‘Mutual Hands Combat technique’, ‘Dividing One’s Mind’, ‘Left Hand Fighting the Right Hand.’ Hence she was laughing before she even answered his question.

“If you are talking about martial arts, I have always admired you since I was a child,” she said. [Zhou Botong was held captive on Peach Blossom Island when Huang Rong was a baby,- see LOCH] “I admit inferiority. Why did you even mention it? I wonder what new and wonderful stances you have invented these past few years?”

But Botong shook his head. “Oh no... No!” he declined, “It was little Yang Guo who is crazy about martial arts these past few years. He has invented the ‘Melancholy Sad Palms’ [An Ran Xiao Hun Zhang], which put me to shame. Therefore, let’s not talk about martial arts.”

Secretly, Huang Rong was very impressed. “This kid Yang Guo is amazing,” she thought, “First it was Guo Xiang, a mere child. Now it is the Old Urchin, a veteran. Everybody praises him. I wonder what kind of kung fu “An Ran Xiao Hun Zhang” is?” Then she asked, “Well, you just said that your skill is getting better by the day. What kind of skill is that?”

Zhou Botong lifted up his hand – with the bee in it, high in the air. He looked so proud.

“This is my skill: keeping bees!” he said.

“Those bees were given to you by Xiao Longnu. What’s so special about it?” Huang Rong asked.

“This is the amazing part,” said the Old Urchin. “The Jade Bees given to me by Xiao Longnu were valuable creatures. After I took care of them, they become even more valuable, very rare, and second to none! This is amazing! How could Xiao Longnu be compared to me?”

Huang Rong laughed a big laugh! “Oh Old Urchin, you have become more shameless than ever!” she said. “This time you blew your own horn really loud. Your ego is unrivalled, very rare indeed! Now, THAT is second to none!”

Zhou Botong was not angry, he even chuckled. “Oh Little Huang Rong, let me ask you this: Human beings are the most intelligent creature; we can tattoo our own body, making pictures of dragons, tigers, or leopards. We can even tattoo a whole book, ‘Peace and Security under the Heaven’ [tian xia tai ping]. However, other than human beings; among the birds or the beasts or the bugs, are there any tattoos?”

“Yes, there are,” answered Huang Rong. “Tigers have stripes, leopards have spots, butterflies and snakes could be decorated with beautiful patterns.”

“But answer this,” continued Botong, “on the bugs, have you ever seen characters?”

“Are you talking about natural bugs?” Huang Rong asked. “If so, then the answer is no.”

“Good! Now let me show you this!” And he stretched his arm toward Huang Rong.

Huang Rong looked at the bee carefully. She saw that on the bee’s wings there were indeed characters! She looked closer,

wanted to know what they said. There were three characters on the right wing, 'Qing Valley's bottom' [Qing Gu Di] and another set of three characters on the left wing, 'I am at Jue' [Wo Cay Jue]. The characters were the size of a grain of rice, yet they were very clear. They looked like they were made with needles.

Huang Rong was amazed, she muttered, "Qing Gu Di, Wo Cay Jue, Qing Gu Di, Wo Cay Jue ... This obviously was not natural, someone must have written it. Considering the Old Urchin's character, he would not have a patience to write these letters ... A moment later she said, "You said this is very rare, second to none. But I am sure you have asked Yinggu to tattoo these six characters! How could you fool me?"

Zhou Botong blushed. "You go and ask Yinggu!" he challenged. "You ask if it was she who tattooed the bee!"

"Don't you think she will conspire with you and lie to me?" Huang Rong asked. "If you said the sun rises from the west, she would certainly say the same thing."

"That's a fact!" said the Old Urchin, "The sun indeed rises from the west. Who said it was from the east?" Even though he said that, his face turned redder. He was embarrassed, shy, and irritated at the same time. He let the bee go and grabbed Huang Rong's hand.

"Come! Come! Come!" he said, "I will let you see it with your own eyes."

He pulled Huang Rong to the side of the hill where a beehive was hung, separated from the other beehives. He stretched his arm into the beehive and caught two bees.

"Now, see this!" he said, showing the Jade Bees to her.

Huang Rong strained her eyes. She found both bees had the three-character sets on their wings. The characters also read, 'Qing Gu Di' on the right wing and 'Wo Cay Jue' on the left wing. She was more amazed. "This is really peculiar," she thought. "I need to get to the bottom of this ..." So she said, "Old Urchin, please catch a few more bees for me!"

Zhou Botong caught four bees, two had characters just like the other, and the other two didn't have any. He showed them to Huang Rong who was silent and did not say that Yinggu tattooed the bees again.

"Now, what else do you have to say?" he asked, laughing heartily. "Today you see the Old Urchin's amazing skill!"

Huang Rong did not reply, she kept murmuring, "Qing Gu Di, Wo Cay Jue, Qing Gu Di, Wo Cay Jue ..." She was still pondering the sentence when suddenly a thought came to her mind, "Ah, it is: 'I am at the bottom of Passionless [Jue Qing] Valley' [Wo Cay Jue Qing Gu Di]. Who is at the bottom of the Passionless Valley? Could it be Xiang'er?" Her heart was beating faster. She turned her head to look at Zhou Botong, and said, "Old Urchin, these Jade Bees were not yours. They flew in from somewhere else!"

Again the Old Urchin blushed. "Ah, this is weird!" he shouted, "How did you know that?"

"Why wouldn't I know?" answered Huang Rong. "These few bees have been flying in for some time now."

"Actually, they have been flying here for a few years," said Botong, "but I never suspected it and never examined their wings. It was just a few months ago that I found out about it."

"Is that true it has been a few years?" Huang Rong asked, thinking hard.

"That's correct! Why would I lie to you?"

Huang Rong was quiet while she walked back to the house. She wanted to see Reverend Yideng, Yinggu, Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang to discuss these extraordinary bees, which she believed must have come from the Passionless Valley. They agreed that something unusual must have been happening in that valley. Because she was continually thinking about her daughter, she asked Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang to accompany her to the valley.

“We have nothing to do here, let us go together,” Reverend Yideng said. “Your daughter and I met the other day. She was really sweet. The Old Monk likes her very much.”

“Thank you,” said Huang Rong, who was saddened by his remark. She thought, “Looks like Reverend Yideng thinks Xiang’er is in trouble, maybe grave danger; if not, I don’t think he would be willing to leave this peaceful and quiet place to go with us.”

Zhou Botong loved action; how could he be left behind? He offered to come along and even persuaded Yinggu to come too.

Huang Rong was comforted. She had three more highly skilled companions. With six people, she believed not many things or enemies would hinder their endeavor to find Guo Xiang. Even if she faced a formidable enemy, Huang Rong believed they would be able to help her.

And so six people and two eagles started the journey to the Passionless Valley.

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In the meantime, Yang Guo realized the appointed meeting time Xiao Longnu had promised him was drawing near. He didn’t dare slow down; he made the trip day and night, only stopping for meals and short rests along the way. He arrived

at the Passionless Valley on the second day of the third month. He was five days early from his sixteen-year appointment with Xiao Longnu.

The Passionless Valley was quiet; nobody was around. The magnificent building complex built by the Gongsun family, was reduced to ruins. In the sixteen years since they parted Yang Guo had visited the valley several times. He used to stay for a few days, wishing the Nan Hai Shen Ni would show mercy and let Xiao Longnu meet him earlier. Every time he came it was with enthusiasm; he left the valley dejected.

Now he saw the forest was thick, but the hills were empty, without any trace of Xiao Longnu. He immediately went to the Broken Heart Cliff, crossed the stone bridge to the message carved by Xiao Longnu's sword on the stone. He lovingly traced the letters with his fingers, and cleaned out the moss at the same time. Afterward he would slowly read the letter, 'Xiao Longnu addresses my husband Yang-lang, please treasure this, and begs that you fulfill this reunion'. His heart was shaken.

For a whole day he kept looking at the characters. That night, he spent the night sleeping on a rope tied between two trees. The next day he looked around the valley where the Passionless Flowers used to be. He and Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang had destroyed them. The flowers were completely gone; instead, he found out that the flower, which he named Dragon Lady Flower [Long Nu Hua], had spread to other places. He picked a bouquet of these flowers and placed them in front of the characters at the Broken Heart Cliff.

He spent the next few days pacing around. He hadn't even slept during the last two days. Today was the seventh day of the third month. He stayed close to the Broken Heart Cliff, and never left even a half-step. He waited from morning till noon, from noon till late afternoon. Every time a breeze

came, or a flower or a leaf fell down, his heart jumped. He would leap up and look everywhere. Where was Xiao Longnu?

Ever since he talked to Huang Yaoshi, Yang Guo had realized that the 'Divine Nun of the South Sea' [Nan Hai Shen Ni] of the 'Great Wisdom Island' [Da Zhi Dao] existed only in Huang Rong's imagination. However, looking at the letter his hope was rekindled. He recognized his wife's handwriting, and he was hoping Xiao Longnu would eventually show up.

The sun was slowly sinking beyond the mountains in the west. Yang Guo's heart was sinking too. When the sun was half-way down the mountain, he cried. He quickly ran toward higher ground. There he saw the full circle of the sun, and he felt relieved. When the sun was completely set, the day would be over ...

Though Yang Guo had climbed to the highest peak, the sun still slowly moved downward, looking like it was being swallowed by the earth. After a while he couldn't see anything but the empty world and the cold breeze that came with the night. He stood silently for about an hour. Afterward the moon slowly rose until it was high above him. He still stood there, unmoving ... like a carved stone statue. Slowly the night was spent but Xiao Longnu was still nowhere to be seen.

Very soon it was dawn. The sun rose again. Another day had begun. The birds were starting to sing, the gentle morning breeze brought the sweet fragrance of the flowers around him. It was a beautiful spring morning. But Yang Guo was oblivious, his heart frozen. He heard a voice in his head, "You fool! She passed away sixteen years ago. She knew she was injured beyond help. She knew you wouldn't want to live alone. So she killed herself and tricked you into waiting for

sixteen years. You stupid fool, she loved you dearly; how would you not know her intention all this time?"

Like a dead man, Yang Guo slowly walked down the peak. He had not had any food nor drink for more than 24 hours. His mouth was dry. He went to a small creek, kneeled down to drink some water. When he saw his reflection in the water, he saw the hair on the side of his head had turned white. He was only thirty-six years old, at the prime of his years. It was untimely for him to have white hair. He also saw his face was dirty. He almost couldn't recognize himself. He pulled away three strands of his hair; two of the three had turned white.

Yang Guo was very miserable. A poem came into his mind, 'For ten years life and death are boundless, immeasurable, unforgettable. Lonely graves a thousand li apart, unspeakable desolation. Unfulfilled desire to meet, slowly turns to dust. The hair on the temples white as frost.' It was the lamentation of Su Dongpo. Yang Guo spent most of his life learning martial arts; his literary skill was limited. Occasionally he would stop by a small wine shop in Jiangnan where he saw this poem hanging on the wall. He felt this poem carried a deep feeling similar to his own; so oftentimes he would read it aloud and unintentionally memorized the poem. He said in his heart, "He thought a ten-year separation was boundless, I have been parted with Long'er for sixteen years. He still had his lonely grave, he knew where his beloved wife's bones were buried; yet I don't even know where my wife's bones are buried." And then his mind drifted to the second half of that poem, the part where the writer remembered his deceased wife in his dreams at night, 'In a quiet night a dream came flooding back. A small window of a country home, showing beautiful hair adornments. Face to face yet invisible, only a thousand drops of tears! Year after year dealing with a broken heart. Bright moonlit night, on a small hill nearby.' He couldn't help but drowning in sorrows. "I ... I have not slept for three whole days and nights ...

certainly not a single dream would come to me,” he said to himself.

Suddenly he jumped up and ran toward the Broken Heart Cliff. He stood in front of the carved letters, and loudly shouted, “Sixteen years later, meet at this place, the love between husband and wife is profoundly deep, never fail this promise.’ Xiao Longnu! Xiao Longnu! This is your own handwriting. Why didn’t you keep your promise?”

His voice was very loud, like a lion or a tiger’s roar; it echoed from the surrounding mountains, “Why didn’t you keep your promise? Why didn’t you keep your promise?...you keep your promise?...keep your promise?”

Yang Guo had always had a strong character, but this time he was deeply downhearted.

“If Long’Er died sixteen years ago, my life this past sixteen years was in vain,” he thought. He looked into the gorge below the Broken Heart Cliff. A thick fog always covered the bottom all year long. He was never able to penetrate the fog to see the bottom of the gorge. When he threw the half-pill away it took a while for the pill to reach the bottom. He lifted up his head and called very loudly, so that the Dragon Lady Flowers around him were blown away. Then he softly said, “You disappeared without any trace. I have looked for you everywhere, yet there is no sign of you. I just realized it today, that you must have jumped down into this bottomless gorge! You have been there for sixteen years, weren’t you afraid you would be lonely?”

Like a vision he could see clearly in his mind: Xiao Longnu – her white dress gently swaying in the wind, came near him. Then he heard her voice seemingly from below him, “Yang-lang, Yang-lang, let not your heart be sad. Don’t be sad ...!” (Yang-lang means my dear husband.)

Suddenly, Yang Guo jumped down into the bottomless gorge
...

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Guo Xiang followed Jinlun Fawang to the Passionless Valley. Their minds and emotions were a world apart. Fawang was a strange man. When he hated someone, he would be like venomous snake or scorpion; but when he liked someone, he could be extremely loving and kind. He was determined to take the girl as his disciple, his successor; therefore, he tended to every single one of her needs. He treated her like Guo Xiang was his most beloved daughter. But Guo Xiang maintained an aloofness towards him. She continually reminded him how the Long Beard Ghost and the Big Head Ghost died by his hands. She was being difficult with Fawang. Fawang was a highly respected man even when he was still in Tibet; moreover, he held the Fawang [Imperial Priest] position of the Mongolian Empire now. Even Khubilai – the fourth prince, had always showed the utmost respect for him. Guo Xiang was only a teenage girl, but she kept making derogatory remarks to him. Didn't she mention that he was inferior to Yang Guo, and that he killed people too easily? Fawang was confounded; he didn't know whether to laugh or to cry.

Finally, they arrived at the Passionless Valley one day. They were startled by a distant cry, "Why didn't you keep your promise?" That was Yang Guo's cry of anguish, anger, desperation, and suffering.

Guo Xiang strained her ears. She thought the voice came from all directions. She was shocked!

"That was Brother Yang!" she shouted. "That was Brother Yang! Let's go and see!" And she leaped forward, running toward the cliff.

Jinlun Fawang followed not too far behind. He perked up. Didn't the girl say that he would face his archenemy? From his backpack he took out his five wheels: golden, silver, copper, iron and lead. He held them tight. Yes, he had mastered the tenth level of the 'Dragon and Elephant Wisdom Dexterity Technique', but he also remembered that in the past sixteen years, Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu certainly had not wasted their time. Therefore, he did not dare to underestimate them.

When Guo Xiang arrived at the Broken Heart Cliff, she saw Yang Guo standing still with red flowers twirling around him. She was afraid of the gorge. She realized her own level of martial arts and did not dare to come closer. All she could do was call, "Brother Yang, here I am!"

Yang Guo did not respond, he didn't even seem to hear her. Guo Xiang was confused; she thought the man looked so extraordinary.

"Brother Yang!" she called again. "I still have one of your golden needles! Listen to me, you cannot commit suicide ..."

Having said that she ran toward the bridge. But just as she was halfway there, she suddenly saw Yang Guo jump down into the gorge! She was really shocked! Whether it was from her intention to help, or out of her love toward him, she kicked the ground and also jumped down into the gorge ...

Jinlun Fawang was about seven or eight 'zhang's [about 21 to 24 meters] behind her. He saw something amiss; he exerted his energy to his feet and flew like an arrow toward her. He wanted to grab her. However, he was still one step behind the girl. Guo Xiang's body had already plummeted down into the bottomless gorge. Fawang was a truly skilled martial artist, and he had guts! Without hesitation he moved swiftly with the 'Hanging a Golden Hook' technique [dao gua jin gou], leaped forward and reached. It was an extremely

dangerous move, because he could be falling down the gorge as well. He managed to grab the end of Guo Xiang's robe, but it ripped and the girl's body kept falling down into the mist below ...

"Ah ...!" he sighed. His hand still holding tight a piece of Guo Xiang's clothes, his eyes stared blankly into the bottomless gorge. He stood there for quite a while until his ears heard someone's calling, "Hey, Bald Monk! What are you doing up there?" He turned his body around to see who was calling him.

There on the hill in front of him stood six people. The one in front was an old man, but had a ruddy face. He was Zhou Botong. Next to him were three ladies, one of whom he knew as Huang Rong. The other two were Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang. Behind them were an elderly couple, one old monk with white hair and beard; the other was a lady in black. He didn't know either Reverend Yideng or Yinggu. But he was a third part scared because he remembered Zhou Botong and recalled his high skill. He also knew Huang Rong's level of martial arts. She was the Eastern Heretic's daughter and the Northern Beggar's disciple. He knew his martial arts were comparable to these Central Plains' experts, yet he was saddened by Guo Xiang's death. He didn't have any keenness to fight. Thus he only said, "Miss Guo Xiang has fallen into this gorge ..."

Hearing him, the six were very shocked, especially Huang Rong. "Is...is it true?" she asked, her voice quivered.

"Why would I lie to you?" answered Jinlun Fawang. "Isn't this a piece of her clothing?" Then he waved the piece of cloth in his hand.

Huang Rong stared hard, and she recognized her daughter's clothes. Her body was trembling, her mouth tightly shut.

Zhou Botong was raging mad. "Stinky Monk!" he barked, "Why did you kill her? Oh, you are so ruthless!"

"It wasn't me," Fawang answered meekly.

"Why would somebody jump down into the gorge without any reason?" shouted Botong. "You must have pushed her! Or you made her jump!"

Fawang shook his head. "No, I didn't do either," he countered, "I wanted to take her as my disciple, I wanted to make her my successor! Why would I do her any harm ...?"

"Phooey!" Botong spat. "That was a really nice old fart! Her grandfather is the Old Master Huang! Her father is Guo Jing! Her mother is this little Huang Rong! Which of these three is not superior to you, Stinky Monk? Why in the world would she take you as her master and inherit your stinky skills? Even if I, the Old Urchin, have mastered only some 'Three Legged Cat' techniques, those techniques are far superior to your junk copper and rusty iron wheels!"

They were quite a distance apart, but the old man's spit had reached Fawang, forcing him to elude it. That spit shot past like a bullet. Fawang was very impressed.

Botong was delighted with Fawang's silence. He shouted again, "Didn't she refuse to take you as her master? Weren't you determined to take her as your disciple? Yes or no?"

Fawang nodded his head. How could he answer otherwise?

"There! You see?" Botong shouted again, "You pushed her into the gorge!"

Fawang was startled, and then he heaved a sigh. "I didn't push her," he said, "I don't even know why she wanted to kill herself ..."

Huang Rong meanwhile, was able to calm herself. She gritted her teeth, lifted up her staff and ran toward Jinlun Fawang. She surrounded the monk with 'sealing' techniques. Her staff floated around Fawang's body, surrounding him from every direction. Huang Rong was driven by anger at her daughter's death, her attacks were deadly.

Although Fawang's martial arts skill was higher than Huang Rong's, the stick technique was exquisite; he did not dare to parry the attacks head-on. Moreover, Botong was standing by, ready to assist Huang Rong. To make matters worse, they were fighting on very narrow ground. Fawang stepped about three feet back, then he kicked his left foot and with a loud whistling sound he jumped over Huang Rong's head.

Huang Rong attacked upward, but her stick was parried by Fawang's silver wheel. Both weapons collided with a loud noise. After taking a deep breath Huang Rong turned around only to see Zhou Botong had started to fight the monk.

Fawang put his wheels back into his bag. It was because Zhou Botong was barehanded. As a sect leader, he must maintain his pride. The opponent was barehanded; he couldn't wield a weapon.

Huang Rong ran back and as soon as he was within reach, she thrust her stick for another attack.

After mastering the tenth level of the 'Dragon and Elephant Wisdom Dexterity', this would be the first time Fawang had an opportunity to test out this new skill against other experts. He saw Zhou Botong raise his fists and attack, so he too raised his fists wanting to fight Zhou Botong's fists head on. Before they actually exchanged blows, Zhou Botong could hear a series of light popping sounds coming from Fawang's hands.

Zhou Botong was startled and did not dare to receive the blow straight on. Zhou Botong bent his elbow a bit and used his 'Vacant Fists' skill.

The blow by Fawang had as much power as 1000 jin-(1 jin is 1/2 kilogram/1lb). One could not say it was comparable to the strength of dragons or elephants but it was impossible for mere flesh and bone to receive such a blow. But when he intercepted the fist of Zhou Botong, it felt empty and vacant like there was no strength in it at all. He was somewhat shocked and used his left palm to strike out again.

Zhou Botong felt that his opponent's power was incredible; he had never experienced something like this before. Zhou Botong loved martial arts and whenever he met someone who had a special skill he would challenge that individual to a duel. He had encountered numerous martial artists in his life; but even he had never heard of, or seen, such strong power as released by Fawang. He did not know what skill Fawang used, so he used his seventy-two stance 'Vacant Fists' to battle him. He used void to intercept solid and nothingness to block solidity. By doing so, he rendered the awesome power of Fawang useless; but it was also impossible for him to wound his adversary.

Fawang had attacked with several stances now, yet it seems his stances could not even tickle his opponent. He became frustrated that his dexterity, which he trained for many years, had not helped him to gain the upper hand.

At this point he noticed a whooshing wind from behind; it was Huang Rong who used her bamboo stick to attack his 'ling tai' [soul platform] accupoint. He raised his hand to block that attack and with one blow he had broken the bamboo stick into two halves. The remaining energy released by that blow sent the dust flying upwards and grit to surge around.

Huang Rong was stunned and leapt aside, she thought, "This awful monk was quite formidable sixteen years ago, but now he seems to be even more powerful. That palm of his was both strange and incredible, what kind of martial arts could that be?"

Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang saw that Huang Rong was in an unfavorable situation, they both attacked Fawang from two sides. One was using a jade flute and the other a sword. Huang Rong called out, "Be careful!" As soon as she finished, there were two cracking sounds. Both flute and sword were broken.

Fawang was saddened by the tragic death of Guo Xiang; he had no intentions of harming anyone else now. He yelled, "Out of my way!" And he did not pursue Lu Wushuang and Cheng Ying.

Suddenly a black figure appeared and Yinggu was standing next to him and had started to attack him; Fawang moved out his palm wanting to strike her on the waist. Yinggu's martial arts skill was inferior to Huang Rong's, but she was trained in the 'Loach Maneuvers' [ni qiu gong]; therefore, she was very good at evading and dodging. When she noticed an incredible force coming towards her, she made two turns and three shuns and cleverly avoided that blow. Fawang did not know that her martial arts had not yet reached the level of a first rate martial arts expert, but somehow she strangely managed to avoid two of his fist attacks. He was quite shocked to see this; furthermore he felt that his incredible skill was unable to overcome the two opponents now. He was becoming frightened and did not want to engage in any further combat. He quickly moved away from Yinggu. Yinggu had put in everything she had to evade those two blows and was happy to see Fawang turning away from her. She did not dare attack again. Zhou Botong yelled, "Don't run!" and he gave chase.

Fawang was about to turn around to parry any attack that came his way; but then he heard a light sound coming towards him. A luxuriant but gentle energy force was surging towards his face. Reverend Yideng had used his renowned “Solitary Yang Finger” to block Jinlun Fawang. Fawang had not considered this monk to be an expert; little did he realize that the energy released from his index finger was that powerful. Reverend Yideng's level of the “Solitary Yang Finger” had reached the level of ultimate proficiency and perfection, the divine energy released was pure, gentle but also abundant and forceful; impossible to block.

Fawang was shocked and moved aside to avoid that blast; he immediately returned with a palm attack. Reverend Yideng saw that his palm was extremely fierce and aggressive and did not dare to block it; he glided away a few steps.

One was an enlightened, eminent Buddhist monk from the south; the other was an extraordinary Buddhist virtuoso from the west; each had just exchanged one stance and did not dare to underestimate his adversary.

Zhou Botong enjoyed his one-on-one duel with the Fawang, but when Reverend Yideng joined the battle he felt it was uninteresting. So he stood aside and observed the battle.

At first there was only one meter or so in between Reverend Yideng and Fawang; but soon, after dodging palm blasts and evading finger fire, the gap between them gradually became wider. They were now standing about four meters apart from each other and used their internal strengths to battle each other from afar.

Huang Rong was observing from the side and saw that the condensation emitted from Reverend Yideng's head was becoming denser and denser. She knew that he kept gathering his internal power and feared that, because of his old age, he would not be able to withstand Fawang.

She was devastated by the death of her beloved daughter and wished to step in and help but knew the two of them were battling each other with internal energy and could not intervene now. She did not know what to do at this point, and then she suddenly heard her eagles shrieking. She whistled to them and pointed at Fawang.

The pair of white eagles called loudly and dove towards the head of Fawang. If it was the Divine Eagle of Yang Guo, Fawang might be a bit afraid. Even though these two white eagles were grand, they were still ordinary birds, Fawang was not afraid of mere birds. He was still battling Reverend Yideng with everything he had and could not divert his attention to something else. Suddenly a pair of white eagles dove towards him; he could only use his left palm to strike out at the eagles. Two forceful palm energies surged towards the eagles. The eagles could not cope with such force and immediately flew up higher. Nonetheless because of this diversion Reverend Yideng immediately gained the upper hand. Fawang struck out a few times with his left palm bringing the battle to a draw again.

The eagles heard the repeated commands from Huang Rong, but their enemy's power was too strong and could only resort to creating a diversion. They would cry out loudly and make diving attacks at Fawang, but when they were a few centimeters away from him they would withdraw the attacks. They could avoid his palms but they could not injure him. They only managed to disturb the concentration of Fawang.

When experts are in battle, their concentration must be at its peak. That was the only way their internal strengths could be fully utilized. The palm energies released by Fawang were superior to Reverend Yideng's but when it came to self cultivation he was very much inferior to the Reverend. Furthermore he was intensely saddened by the loss of Guo

Xiang, which affected his state of mind and now the eagles kept pestering him adding more frustration to his spirits.

Because of his frustration, his palm energies were affected. Reverend Yideng smiled and made a step forward. Huang Rong saw Reverend Yideng advancing; she raised her voice and called out, "Guo Jing, Yang Guo! You're here too? Let us capture him together!"

Guo Jing was her husband; she would never call out his full name, but her intention was to frighten Fawang. If she called out 'Brother Jing', Fawang would probably think 'Who is that?' And the effect of her trick would not be so effective.

Her trick worked and Fawang panicked when he heard the names Guo Jing and Yang Guo; he thought, "Those two experts are here too. I will not live to see another day."

At this point, Reverend Yideng made half a step forward again. In mid-air the eagles saw an advantage and the female eagle screeched and dove towards the face of Fawang. Her claws were aimed for his eyes. Fawang cursed, "Hellish bird!" and raised his left palm to hit the eagle.

The female eagle broke off her attack when she was about four meters away from Fawang, it was only meant to be another diversion. The male eagle silently came in from the side and when Fawang noticed, his right claw had almost grabbed his baldhead. Fawang was both angry and shocked; he whisked his palm hitting the eagle on its breast. By this time the male eagle had seized Fawang's Buddhist hat and was flying away. The whisked palm of Fawang was incredible and the eagle could not withstand it. The male eagle made somersault in mid-air and fell into the deep gorge.

Huang Rong, Cheng Ying, Lu Wushuang and Yinggu called out with shock.

Zhou Botong became angry and yelled, "Damn monk! The Old Urchin will disregard Wulin traditions today and fight you too." He raised his fist and attacked Fawang from the back.

The female eagle heard the shriek of the male eagle and did not see it flying up from the gorge; she too dove towards the chasm and did not fly back up immediately.

Fawang was attacked from both sides and was afraid now. Although he had high martial arts skills, how could he withstand the combined attacks of two great martial arts masters? He lost his appetite for the fight and took out his golden and silver wheels to block the 'Solitary Yang Finger' and 'Vacant Fists'. He leaned to the left and leapt up towards the left and he gained access to the plains area of the valley. Zhou Botong yelled and gave chase.

Fawang had gone through a lot to escape and was running as fast as possible; he knew if he was detained by Zhou Botong, he would have to fight at least another few hundred stances to determine a victor. Furthermore, if the old monk took advantage of the situation, he would surely perish here in this valley. Ahead was a thick forest and he was running towards it, when suddenly a light sound was heading towards him; it was a small stone.

He was still a hundred paces or so away from the forest, but he did not know who shot that little stone towards him. The energy was incredible, although it was only a small stone the whooshing sound emitted by it was very loud. It was aimed directly at his face. Fawang raised his silver wheel and blocked the stone. It broke into dozens small pieces and scattered around; but two of them hit him on the face. He was not injured, but he certainly felt the pain.

He thought, "That small rock was shot from afar and shook my wheel. This person's internal strength is not inferior to the

Old Urchin and the old monk, how is it possible that another such expert exists?"

While he was stunned for a minute, an old man in a long green robe walked out of the forest. He looked very suave and distinguished. Zhou Botong was happy to see him and shouted, "Old Heretic Huang! This damn monk is responsible for the death of your granddaughter. Let us capture him together."

The distinguished old man was the Master of the Peach Blossom Island, Huang Yaoshi. After he and Yang Guo went their separate ways he decided to wander around in the north. One particular day he saw the two white eagles at a small village; he knew either his daughter or grandchildren were around. So he decided to follow them, but he did not wish to be seen by his daughter and followed them from afar. When he saw that both Reverend Yideng and Zhou Botong could not defeat this monk, he was quite surprised. He thought that this monk was a worthy adversary and decided to intervene as well.

Jinlun Fawang struck his wheels together creating a loud 'dang' sound, similar to the cry of a dragon. He said, "I take it you are the Eastern Heretic Huang Yaoshi?"

Huang Yaoshi nodded and said, "Yes, I am, Reverend. What can I do for you?"

Fawang said, "Even back in Tibet we have heard that only the Eastern Heretic, Western Poison, Southern Emperor, Northern Beggar and Central Divinity were all-powerful in the Central Plains. It pleases me to see that you live up to your reputation. I would like to ask where the other four great masters are."

Huang Yaoshi replied, "The Central Divinity, Northern Beggar and Western Poison have passed away many years ago. This

Reverend Yideng here is the Southern Emperor and Brother Zhou is the younger martial arts brother of the Central Divinity."

Zhou Botong came fast. He said, "If my martial arts brother was still alive, would you be able to withstand even ten of his stances?"

Reverend Yideng also came fast. Together with the Eastern Heretic, they formed a triangle surrounding Fawang. Fawang looked at Yideng; then at Botong; and finally at the Eastern Heretic. He sighed and threw his five wheels to the ground.

"If it were a one-on-one combat, I wouldn't budge a single inch to any one of you," he said wryly.

"You are right!" answered Zhou Botong, "But right now we are not having a competition on top of Mount Hua to fight over the title 'The Number One Valiant Man under the Heaven'! Who would want to fight you one-on-one? Hey, Stinky Monk, you have done too many wicked deeds. You decide your own fate!"

"I have seen two out of the top five experts of the central plains," said Fawang. "If I could die by your hands, I would not have any regrets. Only my highest skill: the 'Dragon and Elephant Wisdom Dexterity Technique' will not have an heir. I am the last one ..."

Having finished his speech he lifted up his hand to smash his own head.

Zhou Botong was startled to hear the name 'Dragon and Elephant Wisdom Dexterity Technique', without hesitation he jumped forward and blocked the monk's hand. "Hold on!" he shouted.

"I, the old monk, can be killed, but not insulted!" said Fawang valiantly. "What do you want?"

“You regret the ‘Dragon and Elephant Wisdom Dexterity Technique’ would not have any heirs,” he said, “Why don’t you teach it to me, then you kill yourself afterward. That way it wouldn’t be lost, would it?”

Before Fawang answered, they heard flapping wings followed by the female eagle flying up from the gorge, her mate on her back. Both birds were wet, which indicated water at the bottom of the chasm; maybe a well or a creek. The male eagle’s feathers were in disarray, but he was still breathing. His claws still held tightly Jinlun Fawang’s Buddhist cap.

As soon as the female eagle placed her mate on the ground, she flew back into the gorge. After a while she reappeared with Guo Xiang on her back.

Huang Rong was shocked, but happy. “Xiang’er! Xiang’er!” she called, and ran toward the bird. She took Guo Xiang off the bird’s back.

Fawang stood astounded to see Guo Xiang was all right. Zhou Botong still held his hand, but he had also seen what the female eagle had done. He looked at Reverend Yideng on his right and Huang Yaoshi on his left, made faces to them and winked.

Eastern Heretic and Southern Emperor saw his expression and immediately moved in unison. As a result, Fawang’s right side and left breast were struck by their powerful fingers. It didn’t matter if Fawang was a tough man, because his attackers were experts. One was ‘Divine Flicking Finger’ [Tan Zi Shen Tong] expert, while the other was ‘Solitary Yang Finger’ [Yi Yang Zi] expert. The Mongolian monk uttered an ‘unh’ sound and staggered. Zhou Botong added a punch to the ‘zhi yang’ [positive end] accupoint on his back, he laughed and said, “Go down!” Fawang’s knees gave out and he fell, sitting down on the ground.

The three experts saw this and were secretly impressed. "This monk is really strong, he was hit three times, yet he did not collapse to the ground, he only sat down ..."

Afterward the three of them came to Guo Xiang. They were trying to comfort her.

"Mother, he's down there ..." said the girl to her mother, "He's down there ... go help him, please ..." Guo Xiang only managed to utter those words before she fainted. Yideng immediately checked her pulse. "She is all right!" he said, "She is just in shock." Then he slowly massaged the girl's wrist. Not too long after, Guo Xiang slowly regained her consciousness.

"Where is Big Brother?" she asked. "Is he up here?"

"Is Yang Guo in the gorge below?" asked Huang Rong. Guo Xiang nodded. "He is!" she said, lowering her head; and then added in her heart, "If he is not down there, why would I jump down?"

"Is there any water down there?" Huang Rong asked again, seeing her daughter's wet clothes. Guo Xiang nodded her head, and then closed her eyes. She was still too weak to say anything, only her finger pointed to the gorge.

"Yang Guo is down there, only the eagle can help him," said Huang Rong. Then she whistled, calling her bird, but strangely after she had whistled several times the bird did not respond. Huang Rong felt strange; the birds have always obeyed her commands for dozens of years. Why didn't it respond this time? It had never happened before. Once again she whistled, loud and long.

Suddenly the bird flew up high into the clouds. She flew in circles emanating a sad cry. And then she dove down very

fast. Huang Rong was shocked. "Not good!" she cried in her heart. Then she called, "Hey, Eagle!"

Her calling was in vain; the bird continued diving down and smashed onto a mountain rock. Her head was smashed, her wings broken, she died instantly.

Everybody was stunned. They ran toward the birds only to find the male eagle's body was cold; he too was dead. No wonder his mate was disconsolate and wanted to die too. They all uttered a long sad sigh.

Huang Rong was the most upset; those two birds were her companions since she and the birds were young. She shed tears involuntarily.

Observing all this, Li Mochou's song echoed in Lu Wushuang's mind:

*'O mortals, what is love? That binds beyond life on earth?
To all corners, in pair we fly... braving summer and winter, by
and by...
Union is bliss, parting is woe, agony is boundless, for a
lovelorn soul, sweetheart...
Give me word, trail of clouds drifting forward...
And mountains capped with snow, whither shall my
lonesome shadow go?'*

When she was a young girl, Lu Wushuang followed her master – Li Mochou, everywhere. Oftentimes, in the dead of the night, when she thought she was dreaming, she heard her master sing this song. She did not know the true meaning of love then, but now she saw it with her own eyes. She thought, "If the female eagle were still alive, she would be flying alone through the clouds and over snow-capped mountains. She was alone, her shadow solitary; how could she live any longer?" Without her realizing it, tears welled up her eyes.

“Shi Fu, Shi Jie,” said Cheng Ying. “Brother Yang is inside the gorge below, how can we rescue him?”

Huang Rong wiped her tears. “Xiang’er, tell me the exact condition of the gorge’s bottom,” she asked, “What was happening to you?”

Guo Xiang was already feeling better. “As soon as I plummeted down into the gorge, I hit the water at the bottom,” she answered, “I was shocked and swallowed a couple of mouthfuls. I don’t know how, but I was immediately pushed back up to the surface. And then Big Brother, Yang Da Ge, pulled my hair, he lifted me up ...”

Hearing this Huang Rong was relieved. “Was there a big rock or something else where you could set your feet on?” she asked.

“There was a big tree right next to the water.”

“Hmm ...” said her mother. “Why did you fall down?”

“That was also the first question Brother Yang asked me when he pulled me up,” answered the girl. “I took my golden needle out, I gave it to him and I said, ‘I come to ask you to take care of yourself, don’t be shortsighted’. He looked at me without blinking. Not too long after the male eagle fell into the water, followed by his mate. The female eagle took her mate up, then she came back to rescue me. Brother Yang told me to go up, he didn’t say anything else. He lifted me up on the eagle’s back. Mother, tell the bird to go back down and rescue Brother Yang ...”

Huang Rong didn’t want to tell her daughter that the birds were dead. She took off her coat and wrapped it around her daughter’s body.

“I believe Yang Guo is not in grave danger right now,” she said, turning to her companions, “Let us make a long rope to

rescue him.”

That was a great idea. Everybody scattered to gather tree bark and braided it into a rope.

All except for Jinlun Fawang – whose accupoints were sealed, and Guo Xiang – who was too tired, worked hard. Cheng Ying, Lu Wushuang and Yinggu braided, while Yideng, Zhou Botong, Huang Yaoshi and Huang Rong gathered tree bark. They were not skilled at making rope; therefore, when the sky darkened all they had was a little over a hundred ‘zhang’s [around 300 meters] of rope.

Even though she felt the rope was not long enough, Cheng Ying put it into the gorge anyway. She tied one end to a rock and the other end to a tree stump and threw the rock into the gorge. The rope slid down, penetrating the thick fog below and vanished from their sight.

These seven people worked hard all night long without taking any rest. The next morning Guo Xiang was strong enough to help. Huang Rong asked her how she got captured by Fawang to help pass the time.

The rope was getting longer and longer. They did not hear anything from Yang Guo down below. Huang Yaoshi was restless; he took out his jade flute and played a song. The sound of the flute echoed and flowed down into the gorge. Usually, as soon as Yang Guo heard the flute, he would whistle in response. When the song ended the gorge was still quiet, still no response, and only a thin mist rising up.

Huang Rong thought hard. She chopped a piece of wood, and carved this letter: “Are you all right? Please respond.” Then she threw the wood into the ravine.

They waited some more, still nothing ... They looked at each other with anxiety in their eyes.

“Even though this gorge is deep, I believe our rope has reached its bottom,” said Cheng Ying. “Let me go down and take a look.”

“Let me!” Zhou Botong did not wait for an answer. Immediately he grabbed the end of the rope and climbed down, agile as a monkey, and disappeared into the fog below. About an hour later he reappeared, his hair and beard was covered with moss. He shook his head.

“Not a single shadow or footprint was there, let alone Yang Guo? No ‘niu guo’ [a live ox], no ‘ma guo’ [a live horse] either [play on words: ‘guo’ of ‘Yang Guo’ also means ‘live’],” he said. They looked at Guo Xiang and were perplexed.

Guo Xiang was almost crying, “I am sure Brother Yang was down there, where could he go?” said the girl. “He was sitting next to the big tree by the water.”

Cheng Ying didn’t say anything; she grabbed the rope and start climbing down. Lu Wushuang followed suit. And then Yinggu, Zhou Botong, Huang Yaoshi and Yideng did the same. They were worried about Yang Guo, but they were also curious.

“You have not recovered Xiang’er, don’t come down,” Huang Rong counseled her daughter. “Don’t make your mother worry about you. If your Brother Yang is down there, we certainly will rescue him, won’t we?”

Guo Xiang was anxious, but she agreed with her mother. Tears welled up in her eyes.

Huang Rong looked at Jinlun Fawang, she thought, “He has been sealed for more than twelve hours. He is highly skilled, perhaps he has managed to unseal some of his accupoints ...” Thus she came to him and sealed some more of his accupoints: ‘ling tai’ [soul platform] on his back, ‘ju que’

[gigantic imperial city] just below his chest, 'qing ling yuan' [clear and cold abyss] on his two arms. Only then did she slide down the rope.

Huang Rong held the rope loosely and let her body fall down fast; then tightened her grip to slow her fall. She did that several times and a short while later arrived at the bottom, and sure enough, she saw a body of water like a pond or a spring. Huang Yaoshi and the others were standing on the shore. She looked around but there was no Yang Guo. On her left she saw several big trees, where about thirty beehives were hung. The Jade Bees were flying around.

"Brother Zhou, could you catch a bee for us to look at, please?" she said to the Old Urchin. "Let's see if it has characters on its wings." Botong complied, he caught a bee. "No characters here," he said.

Huang Rong looked around. All she could see were rock walls a few hundred meters high. There was no way out. There were only those few peculiar looking trees; she didn't know what kind of trees they were. She looked up, and all she could see was thick fog covering the gorge, she couldn't even see the sun. She was thinking hard when suddenly Botong shouted, "Here! This one has characters on it."

Madam Guo quickly looked, and sure enough, she saw the same letters on this one, 'I am at the Passionless Valley's bottom'. This made her think some more, she believed the answer must be in the water below. Among the seven people, her water skill was the best. She made up her mind. She tucked her clothes up, took a 'Nine Flower Jade Dew Pill', put it in her mouth to repel any venomous bugs or snake bites, and jumped into the water.

The deeper Huang Rong dived, the colder the water temperature was. She felt the cold creeping into her bones. She opened her eyes underwater, but all she could see was

the deep bluish green water. The water felt like ice. She was puzzled, but determined to continue her investigation. She went to the surface for another deep breath, and dived again. She went further this time, and she felt a strong buoyancy force pushing her back up. The deeper she went, the stronger the force was. She exerted her energy but it was no use, she could not reach the bottom no matter what. Except for the cold temperature, the water did not show anything special anyway. Therefore, she went back to the surface in defeat.

All could see she was cold; her lips were blue and her hair white from the frost. They were astonished. Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang promptly gathered sticks and lit a fire for Huang Rong to warm herself up.

In the meantime Guo Xiang was waiting above, she thought very hard, “Why wouldn’t Brother Yang come up? Did my grandfather and mother persuade him to come? What was the real reason he tried to kill himself? Was it because Xiao Longnu had passed away and they wouldn’t see each other anymore?”

While she was lost in thought, she heard Jinlun Fawang groaned, “Aiyo! Aiyo!” “You asked for it!” said Guo Xiang, “Who told you to kill so easily? Hmm...”

Jinlun Fawang did not reply, but he kept making groaning noises while his eyes looking at her begging for mercy. By nature Guo Xiang was kindhearted. She couldn’t take it anymore. “Are you really sick?” she asked.

“Your mother has sealed [ling tai] accupoint on my back and [ju que] below my chest. Those sealed accupoints made me suffer like a million ants were biting me,” the monk answered, “It is not only so painful but itchy as well. Why didn’t your mother seal my ‘shan zhong’ [heart center] and ‘yu zhen’ [jade pillow] accupoints?”

Guo Xiang was startled. She understood from learning with her mother, that [shan zhong] and [yu zhen] were two of the vital accupoints. A little injury on these two could cause death.

“My mother does not wish for your death,” she said. “You do not thank her, but keep whining incessantly!”

Jinlun Fawang showed a proud look. “If she sealed my [shan zhong] and [yu zhen], she would make my back and chest numb,” he said, “She would cause me less pain. I have trained to this high level; I wouldn’t be injured that easily. Could it be that she really wishes for my death?”

Guo Xiang did not believe him. “Don’t you lie to me!” She countered. “Mother said that if [shan zhong] and [yu zhen] were sealed, you would certainly die! You are only experiencing itchiness and a bit of pain. Take heart. My mother and the others will be here shortly.”

Jinlun Fawang did not respond. “Miss Guo,” a little later he asked, “How would you say my treatment of you was along the way?”

“Not a single complaint,” answered Guo Xiang. “But you have killed the Long Beard Ghost and the Big Head Ghost. You have also caused the death of my two eagles. Even if your treatment of me was a lot better, I still cannot accept what you have done.”

“Very well!” shouted the monk, “An eye for an eye! You kill me to avenge the death of your friends and your birds! But remember that I have treated you well along the way; how would you repay me for that?”

“You tell me how I can repay you.”

“You have to seal my [shan zhong] and [yu zhen],” answered the monk. “That way you would lessen my suffering. That

way you repay my kindness.”

Guo Xiang shook her head. “You want me to kill you?” she asked, “I will not do that.”

“But I am a man as tough as a mountain!” Fawang insisted, “Even if you seal those accupoints, I will not easily die. Later when your mother is here, I will beg for her mercy. Do you really think I’d like to die?”

Seeing his pitiful condition, Guo Xiang pondered his words. “Very well,” she thought, “I will lessen his suffering.” Then she sealed his [shan zhong] and [yu zhen] accupoints. Fawang immediately felt relieved. “Yes! I feel better,” he said. “Please hit harder.” Guo Xiang complied, she hit harder.

Fawang’s eyebrows twitched, he smiled. He did not show any sign of injury, but his countenance changed from red to white, and from white back to red again.

“OK, please hit even harder now,” he again said. Guo Xiang complied; she hit harder utilizing the technique her parents taught her.

“Good!” finally Fawang shouted. “My chest is not tight anymore! You see, I am not dead, am I?”

Guo Xiang was astonished. “Let me hit your [yu zhen] one more time!” she said. She’d gently hit him then, but she hit him really hard this time.

“Thank you! Thank you!” said Fawang. He immediately closed his eyes. A little while later he suddenly leaped up and said with a loud voice, “OK, let’s go!”

Miss Guo was flabbergasted. “You ... you ...” she stammered.

Fawang’s left hand flew out and grabbed the girl’s arm. “Let’s go!” he said. “Jinlun Fawang’s skill is without equal under the

heavens. How could I not know all about this rudimentary skill?" As soon as he finished talking, he immediately walked forward, dragging Guo Xiang along.

"Liar! Liar!" Guo Xiang shouted; she regretted her actions and thought, "My knowledge is so shallow, I don't even know this rudimentary technique existed." How would she know the 'tui jing zhuan mai, yi gong huan xue' [transferring blood flow passage, exchanging accupoints position] was not rudimentary at all? Fawang had trained himself in this difficult technique since the time he was still in Tibet. It was not superior to Ouyang Feng's technique in which he was able to reverse the blood flow in his whole body; but it was not less strange or less difficult to master. When Guo Xiang hit his [shan zhong] and [yu zhen] accupoints, he secretly transferred that energy to unseal the other accupoints.

They were only a few meters away when Fawang suddenly had an evil thought. He saw the end of the rope tied to a tree stump. He thought that if he cut the rope, Zhou Botong, Yideng, Huang Yaoshi, Huang Rong and the others would die in the gorge, since they would have no other way of coming back up. Therefore, he kicked the ground and leaped toward the tree and grabbed the rope, ready to sever it.

Guo Xiang saw his movement; she was shocked. She knew what he was up to. She could not stay silent. Her arm was still held in the monk's hand. When her other hand was within reach of the monk's body, she made her move and hit his 'yuan ye' [deep pool liquid] accupoint beneath his ribs.

Jinlun Fawang had underestimated the girl and now he had to suffer the consequence. That hit was right on target. He was stunned and immediately felt half of his body stiffened, his strength gone.

With one pull Guo Xiang was able to free herself. She went behind him and threatened, "I am going to push you down

smelly monk! I hope you'll die!"

Fawang was shocked, but he didn't show it. He laughed a big laugh. He secretly exerted his internal energy to unseal his accupoint. He said, "How could you hurt me with your meager skill?"

Guo Xiang did not know that her hit actually sealed Fawang's accupoint and that Fawang's body was stiff. If she pushed, he would certainly fall down. But she was afraid to repeat her past mistake, that if she touched his body one more time the monk would be able to free himself. Didn't she hit the monk and in the end Fawang was free? Therefore, instead of pushing him, she jumped down and got away from him. She ran toward the chasm and shouted, "I'd rather die with my mother!" She was going to jump down into the gorge.

Jinlun Fawang was extremely shocked. He breathed in and out deeply, and eventually his sealed accupoint was clear. Abandoning the rope he quickly jumped after the girl.

Guo Xiang kept running between big rocks and among the trees. If she were out on a plain, Fawang would certainly catch up with only two leaps. Right now the monk had to play her game. There were a lot of old trees and big rocks scattered around the Broken Heart Cliff. By running around like this Guo Xiang was able to elude him. It was like they were playing tag. Fawang leaped over the trees and with 'Wild Duck Descends the Plain [yan luo ping sha] techniques he was able to grab Guo Xiang's arm once again.

Guo Xiang was shocked; she thought she could get away from him. She struggled in vain; but then she opened her mouth and shouted at the top of her lungs, "Mother!"

Fawang quickly covered her mouth with his free hand. Meanwhile a voice was heard from a distance, it was Lu Wushuang, "Uh, where did little Guo Xiang go?"

"Pity, pity ..." Fawang's heart turned cold. "I have wasted too much time." He regretted the fact he failed to cut the rope; he was forced to seal the girl's mute accupoint and took her away as quickly as he could run. He was so confused that he couldn't think straight. He only heard Lu Wushuang's voice. If he attacked her, how could Wushuang fight him? It was just that he had suffered a bitter defeat from Zhou Botong, Reverend Yideng and Huang Yaoshi; so when he heard someone was coming he thought everybody had arrived.

Huang Rong and the rest were still at the gorge's bottom. They could not find any footprint or traces of blood, in case Yang Guo was injured. Finally they decided to go back up and discuss this matter later. Lu Wushuang was the first to go, followed by Cheng Ying and Yinggu. When Huang Rong showed up, she was startled to hear them calling her daughter, "Little Guo Xiang! Little Guo Xiang! Where are you?" The women were puzzled at seeing neither Guo Xiang nor Jinlun Fawang.

Huang Rong climbed a tall tree to get a good look around. In the meantime Huang Yaoshi together with Reverend Yideng and Zhou Botong arrived. They were perplexed and anxious. They looked around the valley, but could not find anything.

When they reached the valley's entrance, they saw one of Guo Xiang's shoes.

"Shi Jie, don't you worry," Chen Ying said, "Fawang must have taken Guo Xiang along with him to the south. Guo Xiang left her shoe behind to give us clue. She's just as smart as her mother."

Huang Rong believed Cheng Ying was right. She was relieved since Guo Xiang would not be in any immediate danger. Didn't Fawang want to take Guo Xiang as his disciple, to inherit his 'Dragon and Elephant Wisdom Dexterity Technique'?

End of Chapter 38.

Chapter 39 - Battle of Xiangyang

Translated by IcyFox, Sunnysnow & Athena



Galloping towards the high platform, the group came to a stop outside the range of the enemy archers. Two people could be seen standing on the platform. One, dressed in a yellow monk's robe, was none other than Jinlun Fawang. The other, a young girl who was tied to a wooden pole, was Guo Xiang.

The group proceeded south and inquired about Fawang (Golden Wheel Monk) and Guo Xiang along the way. Soon news came from everywhere saying the North and South Mongolian Armies are besieging Xiangyang, engaging the Song soldiers at the foot of the city several times, with both sides suffering many losses. The situation there was grave and urgent. Huang Rong was worried and said, "The Mongols are attacking Xiangyang, we must get there fast. Let's ignore Xiang'er's safety temporarily." The group agreed unanimously.

The elders Huang Yaoshi, Yideng and Zhou Botong did not bother about worldly affairs, but Xiangyang's fate was extremely important, besides everyone was putting in their best to defend it, so they could not ignore the situation.

They did not meet any delays on their journey and so they reached the outskirts of Xiangyang in a day. They found the battle trumpets sounding continuously and the flags waving, the swords were like a forest and horses were running frantically about. The city was like a speck in the desert as the Mongol Armies surrounded it. When they saw this, they were shocked and dismayed. Huang Rong said, "The enemy is mighty. We must wait till evening before attempting to get in." They then hid in the nearby forest and apart from Zhou Botong who was smiling mischievously, the rest looked grim.

At the second watch, Huang Rong led the way and charged through the enemy camps. Although their martial arts were

powerful, the Mongol camps were vast, one coming after the other. They were only halfway through when the patrols spotted them. The soldiers sounded the alarm and three hundred squads surrounded them. The rest of the camps, however, did not stir and were still calm.

Zhou Botong grabbed two long spears and tried to open a way out while Huang Yaoshi and Yideng held a shield each guarding the rear and blocking the troops. The four women were in the middle and the group pushed their way out anxiously. They were still in the camp and so the enemy did not fire arrows at them for fear of hitting their own horses and losing a valuable war asset. However when they reached the open plains the archers fired relentlessly, causing Zhou Botong, Yideng and the others, to have a hard time fending them off. The seven people moved and fought at the same time but the enemy troop numbers became larger and larger, with dozens of spears piercing towards them. Zhou Botong, Huang Yaoshi and the rest unleashed their mighty palm power and smashed many spears and killed many soldiers. But the Mongols were much superior in numbers and they fought fiercely, forcing the group into a dangerous situation.

Zhou Botong laughed, "Old Heretic Huang, looks like our three old lives are going to be lost here, but you must think of a way to get these four beauties safely out of here." Yinggu spat, "What rubbish! How can an old woman like me be a beauty? If we are to die, we die together; let's just save these three beauties."

Huang Rong was secretly shocked, "The Old Urchin looks like he's not afraid of the earth or the sky and never says a serious word. Today we're heavily surrounded and he thinks of sacrificing his life, it looks like this situation is indeed dire!" The enemy gathered together like ants from all directions and apart from fighting to the last man, she also could not think of any way out.

After charging through several more camps Huang Rong saw two large black tents on the left and since she had accompanied Genghis Khan on his western expedition, she knew the tents were used to store the grain. She snatched a torch and dashed to the tents. The soldiers shouted and chased her. She ran forwards quickly and darted into a tent, and set everything on fire. Soon the tents were ablaze and she rushed out and rejoined her party.

The tents contained many flammable objects and the fire caused many small explosions within. Zhou Botong found this interesting and threw his spear aside and snatched two torches and ran around setting everything in sight on fire. He unwittingly set a stable on fire causing the horses to neigh unceasingly, throwing the camp into chaos.

Guo Jing heard some confusion in the camp to the west of the city and he rushed to the city wall. He saw a few people rushing out from a burning camp and knew they were creating trouble for the enemy so he quickly dispatched the Wu brothers with two thousand men to meet the party.

The Wu brothers had not gone a mile when they saw Huang Yaoshi supporting Lu Wushuang and Yideng supporting Zhou Botong. The seven people rode on five horses galloping quickly. The Wu brothers did not go forward to attack the enemy but ordered the men to get into formation, holding the enemy back. They then ordered the flank to come forward and support the party while everyone retreated back into the city.

Guo Jing was waiting at the top of the city wall and saw it was his father-in-law, wife, Reverend Yideng, Zhou Botong and company. He was delighted and quickly went forth to receive them. He saw that Lu Wushuang had been hit by an arrow in the waist; three arrows were lodged in Zhou Botong's back and his eyebrows were scorched by fire. The

two people were badly injured. Cheng Ying and Yinggu also suffered arrow wounds but their condition was not so serious. Yideng and Huang Yaoshi had deep medical knowledge but when they examined Zhou Botong and Lu Wushuang, they frowned and remained silent.

Zhou Botong laughed, "Emperor Duan, don't fret, this Old Urchin won't die so easily. You should spend more effort treating that beauty Lu Wushuang." He had always made monkey faces at Huang Yaoshi but he respected Yideng and was perhaps even fearful of him. Yideng had become a monk many years ago but Zhou Botong still addressed him as 'Emperor Duan'. Huang Yaoshi and Yideng saw that he had a high tolerance to pain so they smiled and stopped worrying. Lu Wushuang, however, was still unconscious.

The following day at the crack of dawn the war drums were sounded and battle chants shouted. The Mongolians had attacked. The Xiangyang troops acted according to Governor Lu Wenhuan and the Defense General's orders and defended the four city gates. Guo Jing and Huang Rong ascended the city walls and saw that the Mongol troops were spread across the mountains and plains, seemingly endless. The Mongol armies had attacked Xiangyang many times, but this time the campaign involved the largest military force ever. Fortunately Guo Jing had spent some time in the Mongol armed forces before and was well-versed in their techniques of capturing a city, so he was well-prepared. No matter how the enemy deployed their archers, firearms, battering rams or scaling ladders, the troops were positioned in such a way that they could counter them all. By sundown the Mongols had already lost 1000 troops but they continued to fight fiercely.

Apart from the myriads of soldiers (1 myriad = ten thousand) in Xiangyang, the population amounted to one-hundred thousand. Everyone knew that once this city fell all would be

lost. So everybody resolutely defended the city; even the old and weak carried the stones and rocks used to repel the enemy. The city resounded with the fighting sounds and the arrows flew overhead like locusts.

Guo Jing wielded a long sword and commanded the troops at the top of the city wall with Huang Rong by his side. The sky was red with the sunset and the scenery was a sight to behold. However at the foot of the city the enemy soldiers swarmed forward and their faces could be seen. Guo Jing stood his ground at the top exuding a heroic aura and his heart was filled with the deep and sincere love for his wife. On this day the mighty enemy was pounding the city and it was uncertain if they could be driven back again. Huang Rong thought, "Brother Jing and I have been married for 30 years; most of our time was spent in this city. The two of us have been defending against the enemy for so long, even if all our blood is splashed on this wall it would not be in vain." She looked at Guo Jing and noticed that his hair had turned a shade whiter and she thought, "Every time the enemy attacks, Brother Jing will have a few dozen more strands of white hair."

Suddenly they heard the Mongols call out together, "May Your Majesty live ten thousand years!" The voices resonated throughout the area. A large banner was hoisted and a metal chariot with a green umbrella came forward together with a large entourage. It was the Great Khan Mengke himself coming to lead the battle.

The Mongols saw that their Khan was here personally and their morale was raised by leaps and bounds. The red flag was waved and the soldiers at the foot of the city split into formations of twenty thousand men attacking the north gate. These troops were the Khan's personal guards and were very highly trained and they were fresh and without battle fatigue. They all wanted to prove themselves to the Khan.

Several hundred scaling ladders were placed against the city walls and the troops ascended like ants.

Guo Jing waved his arms, shouting, "Brothers, today we shall let the Khan see the might of the heroes of Great Song!" His shout was generated by his chi and everyone could hear him clearly amidst the din. The Song troops had battled for a day and were getting tired, but when they heard Guo Jing shouting, their weary senses were jerked into attention and they thought, "The Mongols have oppressed us long enough, today we shall show their Khan what we're made of!" Everyone gave their best to the life and death battle.

The Mongol soldiers' bodies were piling higher at the foot of the city wall and the troops at the back became mad with rage, stepping on the bodies to assault the city. The Khan's attendants rode back and forth to relay the orders and deployed troops forward. Dusk was approaching and thousands of torches were lit, throwing so much light that it seemed like day.

When Governor Lu Wenhuan saw this situation, he saw that the city could hardly be defended. He timidly ran up to Guo Jing and Huang Rong stammering, "Hero... Hero Guo, we can't defend anymore, let's... let's leave the city and retreat south!"

Guo Jing sternly said, "How can the Governor say that? Xiangyang exists and we exist; Xiangyang falls and we fall!"

Huang Rong saw that the situation was precarious and if Lu Wenhuan suddenly gave the order to retreat, the troops would be thrown into confusion and Xiangyang would be overrun. She shouted, "If you dare to say anything about retreating I'll bore three holes through your body!" Lu Wenhuan's guards came up to block her but she swept across with her leg and the guards fell backwards.

Guo Jing shouted, "Let's go up and repulse the enemy together! If we don't fight to the death, how can we consider ourselves true men?" The soldiers all respected Guo Jing; hearing him shout with determination, they agreed and grabbed their weapons, sprinting to the edge of the walls to fight the oncoming enemy troops. General Wang Jian hollered, "We must defend the city tenaciously, the Mongols can't hold on any more!"

A Mongol officer shouted, "Everyone listen - The Khan has decreed that the first man up the city wall shall be the Lord of Xiangyang!" The Mongol troops cheered and the whole body of soldiers rushed forward without regard for their lives. Meanwhile an officer came forward with a red flag bearing the decree. Guo Jing grabbed a metal bow and shot an arrow which flashed through the air. The officer was hit and he immediately fell off his horse. The Mongolians called out in surprise and their morale was deflated. Before long, another battalion arrived at the foot of the city.

Yelu Qi took a long spear and ran to Guo Jing, saying, "Father-and Mother-in-law, the Mongolians are still not withdrawing, I would like to get out of the city and engage them."

Guo Jing said, "Yes! Take four thousand soldiers with you. But be careful." Yelu Qi turned around and descended from the wall. Before long the battle drums were sounded and Yelu Qi together with one thousand Beggar Clan members and three thousand soldiers charged out of the city in full battle gear.

At the north gate the Mongol troops were in a desperate situation; when they saw the oncoming Song troops charging towards them, they fled immediately. Yelu Qi's regiment pursued them. Suddenly the Mongolian troops fired three canon shots and twenty thousand soldiers surged forward and surrounded Yelu Qi's four thousand troops.

The three thousand soldiers had good training and good martial arts and were very brave. Together with the one thousand Beggar Clan members, they were not intimidated even though they were surrounded. Guo Jing, Huang Rong, Lu Wenhuan and Wang Jian were watching the ongoing battle below but saw that the Song battalion's formation was still orderly even though they were fighting one against five. In the darkness the weapons flashed under the torches' light and it seemed like a hundred thousand silver ants dancing. It was a bloody battle!

The Mongol armies were now using twenty thousand troops to hold down Yelu Qi's four thousand troops and another ten thousand soldiers to scale the city wall.

Guo Jing saw that Yelu Qi's troops were trapped outside the city and the Mongolians were sending even more reinforcements. Then he ordered the Wu brothers to leave a gap and allow the Mongolians to get onto the city walls. The thousands of Mongol soldiers at the foot of the city thought that they had broken the defenses and they cheered.

Lu Wenhuan's face turned pale and he trembled uncontrollably. He was saying, "Hero Guo, How... how... how can this be good? We should... should..."

Guo Jing did not reply and saw that about five thousand troops had already ascended the city wall then he waved his black command flag. The drums sounded and Zhu Ziliu and Wu Santong suddenly appeared and ambushed the enemy, closing the gap and stopping the enemy's invasion. The five thousand soldiers were trapped inside the city.

At this time some of the Song soldiers were trapped outside the city while the Mongol soldiers were trapped inside. Fierce fighting was still going on at the east, west and south gates and the soldiers were shouting unceasingly.

The Khan was sitting atop a small hill directing the battle himself, and beside him were more than two hundred battle drums, producing deafening noise. A man could hardly hear himself over the din. The dead and the injured were lying everywhere and the blood covered the armour and weapons. The Khan had experienced many battles and conquered many lands even into Europe; many armies flee on sighting his armies. This time, however, he witnessed a crushing setback and he was surprised, thinking, "Everyone says the Southerners are weak and useless, but these people are no weaker than my armies!"

It was the third watch now and the moon and stars were shining brightly, illuminating the Earth. All was calm and still except the thousands of people fighting to the death for this city.

They fought late into the night and the losses on both sides were heavy and victory was still undecided. The Song soldiers occupied an advantageous position while the Mongols were superior in manpower.

Suddenly the soldiers at the front called out and a squad of Song soldiers charged out and rushed to the small hill. The Khan's personal guards all fired a volley of arrows to hinder them. Mengke looked down and saw a Song general carrying two spears and riding a large horse moving swiftly on the battlefield and could not be blocked. The arrows flew towards him like torrents of rain but he blocked all of them. Mengke waved his left hand and the drumming stopped. He asked around, "This person is so brave and fierce, who is he?"

A white-haired general said, "Your Majesty, that person is Guo Jing. Years ago Genghis Khan made him the Golden Knife Prince Consort (Jing Dao Fu Ma) and he greatly contributed to the western campaign."

Mengke called out in dismay. “Ah, so it’s him! He really lives up to his reputation!”

Mengke’s generals, hearing him praise Guo Jing so highly, were angered. Four of them yelled out, grabbed their weapons and charged towards him.

Guo Jing saw that these four people were tall and their horses large. Two of them wore white head gear and the other two wore red head gear. Their voices were like rumbling thunder and their horses were swiftly closing in on him. He raised a spear and chopped down, cutting the saber of one of the generals into two and pierced him in the chest with the other spear. Another two thrust out their spears and tried to block Guo Jing’s spears. The last general thrust his Snake Spear towards Guo Jing’s abdomen. All four of them were using long weapons and he could not turn in time to face the last spear, so he released his spears and avoided the spear thrust at his abdomen. He then grabbed the other two generals’ spears and snatched them away like a bolt of lightning. The two generals were well known warriors of the Mongolian armies but how could they resist Guo Jing’s extraordinary strength? They felt their arms go numb and Guo Jing quickly turned the spears around and thrust them towards their chests. The spears could not penetrate the strong armour but the blow caused them to cough up blood and fall from their horses.

*The white head-gear is the rank insignia of a regimental (the thousand men) commander while the red head-gear is the rank insignia of a battalion (one thousand men) commander.

The last general was very brave and although he saw his three comrades die, he still attacked with his spear. Guo Jing avoided his thrust again and smashed down heavily on his helmet, crushing his skull.

Everyone saw Guo Jing kill four brave generals within a few seconds and became frightened. Even though they were in

front of the Khan's chariot, they did not dare step forward to fight him; they could only fire arrows hoping to ward him off. Guo Jing's horse galloped up the small hill but hundreds of spears formed a wall in front of the Khan so he could not get closer. Suddenly his horse was struck by two arrows and collapsed; the Mongol soldiers cheered and swarmed forward.

However Guo Jing leaped up and pierced a company commander (Bai Fu Zhang) and jumped onto his horse. He swept his spear about forcefully and killed more than ten guards.

He dashed about wildly and the soldiers around him fled. He could kill at will amidst the hundreds of troops and the Mongol soldiers could not handle him. Mengke frowned and commanded, "Whoever kills Guo Jing will be rewarded with ten thousand taels of gold and a triple promotion!"

Guo Jing saw that the situation was dangerous and he realized he could not reach the Khan. He killed a few more troops nearby and quickly shot an arrow towards Mengke. Although the arrow was not shot with great strength, it flashed through the air like a lightning bolt and flew straight towards Mengke. The guards were stunned and two company commanders quickly used their bodies to shield the Khan. The arrow sliced right through the first and lodged in the second's chest. The two of them were stuck together but they did not fall.

When Mengke saw this, his face turned pale. His guards surrounded him and they retreated down the hill.

At this time many Mongol soldiers shouted. A body of Song soldiers charged out and the leader wielded two metal oars and swung them around fiercely; it was the Fisherman (the Secret Fisherman from Si Shui 'si shui yu yin'). Huang Rong saw that Guo Jing was not doing well and was worried. She sent the Fisherman together with 2,000 men as

reinforcements. The Mongols saw their Khan retreating, causing their battle formation to crumble.

Huang Rong saw everything clearly and commanded, "Everybody, yell that the Khan is dead!" The soldiers cheered, "The Khan is dead! The Khan is dead!" The Xiangyang troops had fought with the Mongolians for many years so had picked up some Mongolian words; now they were shouting and yelling in Mongolian.

When the Mongol troops heard this, they turned around and saw their Khan's Banner Party retreating hastily. They thought their Khan really was dead, so they discarded their weapons and quickly ran off.

Huang Rong ordered the soldiers to pursue them and opened the north gate. Thirty thousand soldiers charged out of the city. Yelu Qi's four thousand men had decreased to half and the remainder chased the enemy together. The Mongol troops, however, were well-trained and withdrew in a swift and orderly fashion, so the Song troops could not catch up. But the five thousand Mongol soldiers trapped in Xiangyang could not escape and were all killed.

When the enemy had gone, it was already morning. This battle was fought for a whole 24 hours and the sand was stained with blood. The bodies piled up into small mountains. Damaged weapons, broken flags and dead horses littered the battlefield.

The casualty rate was forty thousand for the Mongolians and around twenty-three thousand for the defenders of Xiangyang. This is the worst defeat the Mongolians suffered since the beginning of the southern campaign.

Although the defenders of Xiangyang managed to drive away the enemy forces, Xiangyang was filled with mourning;

mothers crying over their sons and wives crying over their husbands.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong did not rest immediately but went to survey the four gates to console and praise the soldiers. They then went to visit Zhou Botong and Lu Wushuang and found that they had largely recovered. Zhou Botong could not tolerate being in bed for too long and he was already pacing around restlessly. When Guo Jing and Huang Rong saw this they laughed. Finally they went back home for a good day's sleep.

The next morning, Guo Jing went to the government office to discuss the military situation with Lu Wenhuan. Suddenly a soldier reported that a Mongolian legion (ten thousand men) was heading towards the north gate. Lu Wenhuan was shocked, "What... they have just left... why are they back? This... this can't be happening!"

Guo Jing immediately went up to the city wall to take a look. The enemy stopped several li (1li/0.5 km) away and did not attack. One thousand workers, after some time, put together a ten storey high wooden tower.

By now Huang Yaoshi, Huang Rong, Yideng, Zhu Ziliu and company were observing the enemy and saw them building a tower. They could not figure out what they were up to. Zhu Ziliu said, "If they're building this tower to spy on the city it's too far out to see anything from there. Moreover, if we fire flaming arrows, the tower will be destroyed, what use is that?" Huang Rong frowned and thought deeply but could not come up with any reasonable explanation. The people around her were equally puzzled. Zhu Ziliu continued, "Could it be that they can't defeat us so they're building some sort of prayer tower? Or are they trying to perform some witchcraft?"

Guo Jing said, "I was in the Mongolian armed forces for a long time, yet I've never seen anything like that before."

As they were talking, they saw the workers digging a deep and broad moat around the tower and used the mud dug out to form some sort of wall. Huang Yaoshi said angrily, "Xiangyang is the hometown of Zhuge Liang. The Mongolians dare to try some silly tricks here; they're really looking down on us."

Then the horns blew and the drums sounded. The legion came up and took up positions on the left of the tower. Then another legion came forward and took up positions on the right. Finally another two legions took up positions at the front and back of the tower respectively. Altogether there were 40,000 soldiers surrounding the tower. The formation spread over a few li and footmen, cavalry, archers and infantry formed up together, looking like a metal wall around the tower.

A trumpet was blown and the drumming stopped; the soldiers were silent and two horses came up to the foot of the tower. The riders got off and went up the tower together. It was some distance away and they could not be seen clearly, but it looked like a male and female.

The people were still wondering what was going on when Huang Rong suddenly screamed and fainted, falling backwards. The people quickly revived her and asked together, "What? What?" Huang Rong's face was deathly pale and she trembled as she said, "It's Xiang'er...it's Xiang'er." Everyone was stunned.

Zhu Ziliu asked, "Madam Guo, what did you see?" Huang Rong said, "I didn't see her face clearly but by intuition I deduced that it must be her. The Mongolians can't take this city so they came up with this evil plan. This... this is totally

despicable... terrible!" Huang Yaoshi and Zhu Ziliu heard this and were speechless; their faces turned pale with anger.

Guo Jing arrived and he asked, "How on Earth did Xiang'er end up there? And how are the Mongolians despicable?"

Huang Rong finally got up and said, "Brother Jing, Xiang'er was unfortunately captured by the Mongolians. They built this tower and filled the base with dry grass and forced Xiang'er up the tower. They're trying to force you to surrender. If you don't they will burn her alive to wrench our hearts and destroy our resolve so that we can't defend the city properly."

Guo Jing was shocked and furious and asked, "How the hell was Xiang'er captured?"

Huang Rong said, "We were busy fighting the enemy for the past several days, so I didn't tell you about this in case you lost your concentration." She then narrated how Guo Xiang was captured by the Golden Wheel Monk (Jinlun Fawang) and how Yang Guo went missing at the bottom of the gorge in Passionless Valley.

After she finished, Guo Jing frowned and said, "Rong'er, it was wrong of you to do that. Without determining if Guo'er is dead or alive how could you just leave the valley like that?" Guo Jing had always respected his wife and never scolded her in front of others, but this time he spoke sternly to her in front of everyone, causing her to blush.

Yideng said, "Madam Guo was suffering an intense chill and could have died from hypothermia. We believed Yang Guo was not there. Besides the young lady had been captured so we quickly gave chase. You can't blame Madam Guo."

Guo Jing did not dare to argue with Yideng and only said sternly, "This girl Guo Xiang has always caused a lot of

trouble. If anything happened to Guo'er how could we be at ease? Just let the Mongolians burn her."

Huang Rong did not say anything but descended from the city wall. The people were all discussing how they could rescue Guo Xiang when they suddenly saw the city gate left open and a single horse galloping north. The rider was of course Huang Rong. Everyone was shocked and Guo Jing, Huang Yaoshi, Yideng and company mounted their horses and gave chase.

They galloped near the tower and stopped out of range of the archers. They saw a young pretty girl tied to a wooden pole at the top of the tower. It was indeed Guo Xiang.

Although Guo Jing said she always created trouble, but she was, after all, his daughter; how could he not be anxious? He said loudly, "Xiang'er, don't worry, Father and Mother are coming to rescue you!" His internal strength was very solid and his voice was clearly heard at the top of the tower. Guo Xiang was already getting dizzy from the hot sun but when she heard her father's voice, she happily shouted, "Father, Mother!"

Fawang laughed, "Hero Guo, if you want me to release her it's very easy. But do you have the courage?"

Guo Jing had always been calm and steady; he was even calmer in precarious situations and was not angered by what Fawang said. He said, "Fawang, if you have a problem, just tell me."

Fawang said, "If you have the benevolence of a parent, come up here with your hands bound and exchange yourself for your daughter." He knew Guo Jing had a high sense of public duty and would not lose Xiangyang for his daughter, so he purposely said this to provoke him into walking into the trap.

But Guo Jing did not fall for it and said, "If it's me you want, why create trouble for my daughter? Since the Mongols fear me, how can I let you kill me so easily?"

Fawang laughed coldly, "Everyone says Hero Guo's martial arts are very outstanding and his bravery is unmatched; but he's actually a coward who's afraid of death." His attempt to provoke him might have worked on others, but Guo Jing just smiled.

However Wu Santong and the Fisherman were provoked by Fawang and they waved their metal hammer and metal ores respectively and surged forward. The Mongol archers were already poised to strike and were only waiting for them to get closer to shoot them down. Reverend Yideng saw that this was not good and jumped off his horse and somersaulted, landing in front of their horses. He waved his sleeves and obstructed the horses, saying, "Go back!" The two had gone forth only because of a burst of anger, but they knew that there would be no return once they went forward. When they saw their master blocking them, they retreated immediately. The Mongols saw this old monk catch up with the horses and could not help but cheer.

Fawang said, "Your daughter is beautiful and intelligent, I like her very much. I want to take her as my disciple and pass down all my skills to her. But the Khan ordered her to be burned alive if you don't surrender. You'll be sad and I'll feel that it's such a pity, please consider this carefully."

Guo Jing snorted but saw about forty soldiers standing at the foot of the tower with fire torches who would immediately set the tower ablaze on Fawang's command. The forty thousand soldiers guarded the tower tightly, how could anyone penetrate their formation? Even if they got through, the soldiers could just set the tower on fire, then, could they rescue Guo Xiang on time?

Guo Jing was with the Mongolian armed forces for a long time so he knew how cruel the Mongolians could be. When they conquered a city, they could kill hundreds of thousands of women and children in a day. Burning Guo Xiang alive was like killing an ant to them. He raised his head and saw that his daughter was thin and pale and was greatly distressed. He shouted, "Xiang'er, you're a good girl of Great Song, don't be afraid. If Father and Mother can't save you today, we'll kill this bald bastard to avenge you! Understand?" Guo Xiang cried and nodded, saying, "Father, Mother, I'm not afraid!"

Guo Jing said, "This is my good daughter!" He took out a metal bow and shot three arrows simultaneously, hitting three soldiers at the top of the tower and the arrows went right through them. They screamed and fell to the ground. Guo Jing's archery skills were taught by the legendary Mongolian General Jebe [Zhe-be] and he'd practiced for many years. He was standing out of range of the Mongolian archers yet he managed to hit the 3 men on the tower. The Mongol troops yelled and quickly raised their shields to protect themselves. Guo Jing said, "Let's go!" He turned the horse around and went back to the city.

They got back up to the city wall. Huang Rong blankly stared at the tower and her heart was beating rapidly.

Yideng said, "Their formation is solid, if we want to save Xiang'er we must first break and destroy the formation of the forty thousand men."

Huang Yaoshi said, "Exactly." He thought for a while then said, "Let's use the "Twenty-eight Star Formation" and battle them."

Huang Rong hung her head and said, "Even if we win, they will set the tower alight, what do we do then?"

Guo Jing said, "We'll try our best. Whether Xiang'er lives or dies we'll leave it to fate. Father-in-law, how do we use the "Twenty-eight Star Formation"?"

Huang Yaoshi laughed, "The formation's changes are complicated. When I saw the "Big Dipper Formation" of the Quanzhen Sect, I thought deeply and came up with this formation to counter their "Big Dipper Formation"."

Yideng said, "Old Heretic Huang is a master of the Five Elements so I think this "Twenty-eight Star Formation" must be incredible."

Huang Yaoshi said, "My formation was originally intended for a fight consisting of only a few dozen Wulin fighters. I never expected to use it in a battle involving thousands of men. But apart from a few changes, it can be used roughly as is. Unfortunately we lost the two eagles." Yideng said, "Let's hope for the best."

Huang Yaoshi said, "If the eagles had not been killed by that bald bastard, we could send them in to rescue Xiang'er by air when the formation is in action. This "Twenty-eight Star Formation" follows the changes of the Five Elements and we need five skilled fighters to head this formation. We already have suitable people for the north, south, east and central. But Zhou Botong is injured so he can't fill the last position. If only Yang Guo were here. His martial arts are not below Ouyang Feng's, but where can we find him now? This last position is really giving me a headache."

Guo Jing looked at the tower then looked far out into the north. His heart flew to the Passionless Valley, and muttered, "I'm worried about Guo'er, I don't even know if he's alive."

On that day Yang Guo was totally heartbroken and thought he would never see Xiao Longnu again and so he jumped down into the gorge, wanting to smash himself up and end it all. However after falling for some time there was a splash and he found himself in a deep lake. He had fallen from a great height and so he sank deeply into the water. Suddenly he noticed a light in front of him which looked like an underwater cave. He wanted to look closely at it but the water's buoyant pressure was too high and he rose back to the surface. At this time Guo Xiang also fell into the lake.

Yang Guo did not hesitate and immediately dragged Guo Xiang to the surface and pulled her to the bank and asked, "Sister, how did you fall down here?"

Guo Xiang said, "I saw you jump down and so I followed suit."

Yang Guo shook his head saying, "Nonsense! Are you not afraid of death?"

Guo Xiang laughed, "If you're not afraid, neither am I."

Yang Guo's heart trembled and he thought, "Don't tell me that at such a young age she already has deep feelings for me?" He shivered slightly.

She then took out the last needle saying, "Brother Yang, on that day when you gave me the three golden needles, you said I could ask for a wish for every needle and you would promise to do it. Today I'm telling you my third wish: Whether or not you get to meet Sister-in-law, you will not commit suicide." She then placed the needle on his palm.

Yang Guo looked at the needle and said, "You came all the way from Xiangyang just to ask for this?"

Guo Xiang was delighted and said, "Yup. You're a man of your word. You won't break your promise to me."

Yang Guo sighed. He had just gone from life to death, then from death back to life. No matter how strong his will to die, he would not repeatedly attempt suicide. He examined Guo Xiang and saw that she was shivering and her teeth were chattering. Her face was void of colour. He picked some dried leaves and wanted to start a fire but their flints were wet and rendered useless, so he said, "Sister, circulate your internal energy to get rid of the cold so you won't get a chill."

Guo Xiang was still worried and asked, "So you promise not to attempt suicide again?" Yang Guo said, "I promise!" Guo Xiang was overjoyed and said, "Let's circulate our energy together."

They sat down together and circulated their chi. Yang Guo had practiced his internal energy on the "Chilled Jade Bed" when he was young and did not fear the cold so he placed his palm on Guo Xiang's back and sent a stream of 'yang' chi to her. Before long Guo Xiang felt warm and stopped shivering.

When she was well-rested, Yang Guo asked how she ended up here in the Passionless Valley. Guo Xiang told him. Yang Guo angrily said, "That Fawang is so ruthless, when we get out of here I'm going to beat him to a pulp." Then they saw a large white eagle crashing down into the lake, appearing to be severely injured. Guo Xiang was surprised and said, "That's my family's eagle." Then another eagle flew down and landed near them after previously retrieving its injured mate and Yang Guo placed Guo Xiang on its back. He thought the eagle would be back to pick him up so he waited for some time but it did not show up. Little did he know that the eagle was dead.

Yang Guo looked around and saw a few bee hives on a large tree. The bees were larger than normal and were of the same species that Xiao Longnu reared back at the Ancient Tomb.

Yang Guo exclaimed in surprise and stood rooted to the ground. He then went over to examine the hives closely. He saw that they were man-made and the workmanship looked like Xiao Longnu's doing.

He thought, "Could Long'er have lived here after she jumped down?" He paced around the bank and felt that the gorge was like the bottom of a deep well. The place hardly received any sunlight.

He walked around and found that some of the trees had much of their bark stripped off and then he saw some flowers and stones arranged neatly. He suddenly became happy and worried at the same time. His heart beat rapidly as he felt that Xiao Longnu must have lived here before but after sixteen years he did not know what might have happened to her. He had never believed in divine intervention but now he was consumed with anxiety and knelt down and prayed, "O' Heaven, please let me meet Long'er again."

After praying, he looked around again but did not find any more traces of her. He sat under a tree and thought, "Even if Long'er is dead there would surely be some remains left behind, unless they have sunk to the bottom of the lake." He then remembered the light beneath the lake's surface and wanted to explore it, so he jumped into the lake.

He shouted, "I must get to the bottom of this. I'll never give up until I find out what happened to her." He dived into the lake and it got colder as he went deeper. Soon the water was icy-cold. Yang Guo did not mind the cold but the buoyant pressure was too high and he could not dive any deeper. He was now out of breath so he surfaced and grabbed a large stone and tried again.

This time he sank rapidly and saw the light again. He quickly swam towards it and strangely felt a swift current sweeping him into a cave. He threw the stone aside and found that the

cave floor was going upwards. Soon he broke the surface with a splash. He saw brilliant sunlight and the fragrance of flowers filled his nose. It was like another world. He looked around and saw beautiful flowers and bright green grass - it was as if he entered a large garden. However the place was still and quiet and there was no one around. He got out of the water and saw a thatched hut several meters away.

He dashed forwards but slowed down after a few steps and thought, "What if I don't find out anything here?" His heart sank and feared that his last hope would soon be dashed. He stopped outside the hut and listened carefully but there seemed to be no one inside. He only heard the bees buzzing.

After a while he plucked up his courage and trembled, saying, "I've come for a visit. Please pardon my intrusion." He repeated this but there was still no response. He lightly pushed open the door and it creaked open.

Stepping in, he looked around and was stunned. The furniture was simple but the house was sparkling clean. There was only a table and chair but its arrangement was very familiar, exactly the same as the arrangement in the Ancient Tomb. He did not examine the place and naturally turned left and he saw a small room. After passing the small room, he found himself looking into a bigger room. In the room the bed, table and chair also had exactly the same arrangement as in the Ancient Tomb. The only difference was that the furniture in the Ancient Tomb was made of stone while the furniture here is made of wood.

On the left was a bed which looked like the "Cold Jade Bed" he'd practiced his Internal Strength on. In the middle, a long rope was suspended through the room like the one he used to practice his Qing Gong (Lightness Skill). Near the window was a small stool which was like the one where he learned to read and write. On the left was a rough wooden cabinet;

when he opened it he saw children's clothes made of tree bark which was exactly of the same design Xiao Longnu made for him years ago. He walked into the room and touched the bed. The tears had already welled up in his eyes but now he could not hold them back and the tears rolled down his cheeks and fell onto the bed.

Suddenly he felt a smooth hand lightly stroking his hair, gently asking, "Guo'er, what's making you unhappy?"

The tone and the manner his hair was stroked was similar to how Xiao Longnu cajoled him when he was young. Yang Guo jerked around and saw a fair and extremely beautiful girl standing gracefully in front of him. She looked exactly the same as the Xiao Longnu he thought of daily and missed terribly for the past sixteen years.

The two of them stared at each other then exclaimed "Ah!" and embraced each other tightly. It seemed so real yet it seemed like a dream.

After a long while Yang Guo finally broke the silence. He said, "Long'er, you've not changed a single bit. But I have aged." Xiao Longnu stared at him and said, "No, it's just that my Guo'er has grown up."

Xiao Longnu was slightly older than Yang Guo by a few years but she lived in the Ancient Tomb since young and learned internal strength techniques from her master, which required her to purge her emotions. Yang Guo however more readily expressed his emotions, so at their wedding the two already looked about the same age.

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The "Jade Maiden Skill's" cultivating techniques from the Ancient Tomb sect concentrates on the essential rules of the "Twelve Nothingness and Twelve Plentifulness" which support

each other. The 'Twelve Nothingness' refers to the restrictions regarding thought, love, desires, matters, words, laughter, worries, fun, happiness, anger, good and evil. The 'Twelve Nothingness' will inevitably become part of one's life. The 'Twelve Plentifulness' states: that if one thinks too much, the concentration will be disrupted. If one loves too much, the energy will break down. If one desires too much, one will lose one's knowledge. If one has too many matters at hand, one will look weary in appearance. If one talks too much, it will affect one's breathing. If one laughs too much, one will strain one's organs. If one worries too much, it will affect one's nerves. If one plays too much, it will affect one's ideas. If one is too happy, it will result in complacency and trouble. If one is too angry, it will affect one's pulse. If one experiences too much good, one will despair. If one experiences too much evil, one will invite chaos. If one does not rid the 'Twelve Plentifulness', one would not reach enlightenment.

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Xiao Longnu had practiced this skill since young and had no happiness or worries, so she was even more emotionless than the founder Lin Chaoying. Once Yang Guo entered the Ancient Tomb things changed and as they got closer she found it harder to follow the 'less speech', 'less action', 'less happiness' and 'less worries' rules. After their marriage they were separated for sixteen years. Yang Guo traveled around and roamed Jianghu and missed her terribly. Xiao Longnu, on the other hand, was forced to live in this deserted valley and could not totally avoid thinking of him. She found herself practicing these principles again to combat her boredom. When they finally met again it appeared as though Yang Guo was older than her.

Xiao Longnu had not spoken for the past sixteen years and now when she started speaking again she was not very fluent. So they did not speak and just stared at each other

smiling. Yang Guo could not contain his excitement any longer and took her hand and ran out of the hut, saying, "Long'er, I'm extremely happy." He jumped up into a big tree and somersaulted several times.

In his excitement he forgot everything and somersaulted just like he did when he was young in the Ancient Tomb. He never thought about this before and never expected to do something like this as a middle-aged man. The only difference was that his qing gong (lightness skill) was excellent and he could somersault effortlessly. Xiao Longnu laughed heartily and cast all the 'less laughter' and 'less happiness' into the wind.

Xiao Longnu took out a handkerchief. Yang Guo finished somersaulting and walked to her grinning. Xiao Longnu would always wipe his sweat with a handkerchief; but now his face was not flushed and he was not breathless, of course he was not sweating. But she wiped his forehead all the same.

Yang Guo took the handkerchief and saw that it was made of tree bark and was rather rough and thought she'd had an uncomfortable life here and was very regretful. He stroked her hair gently and said, "Long'er, you have suffered much these past sixteen years."

Xiao Longnu sighed and said, "If I hadn't grown up in the Ancient Tomb, the past sixteen years would not have been easy for me."

They sat shoulder to shoulder beside a stone and talked about past events. Yang Guo asked her every single detail. As Xiao Longnu talked for a while, her speech became more fluent; then she slowly narrated her story of the past sixteen years.

That day when Yang Guo threw the half-pill down in the gorge Xiao Longnu knew he did not want to be left alone since her condition was supposedly fatal. That night she thought carefully and decided to die first and kill off his thoughts of suicide so that he would neutralize the "Passionless Poison". She was afraid that if she left traces of her suicide it would only hasten his suicide. She thought for half a night and then she finally went to the Broken Heart Cliff and carved the words. She purposely made a sixteen-year long appointment and then she jumped into the gorge. At that time she thought that if Yang Guo's life could be saved, after sixteen years he would have forgotten her and dispelled his thoughts of suicide.

When she said this, Yang Guo sighed, saying, "Why did you think of sixteen years? If you said eight years wouldn't we have been reunited eight years ago?"

Xiao Longnu said, "I'm aware of your deep feelings for me and eight years would be too short to ease your feelings. Ah, I didn't expect that even after sixteen years you would still jump down."

Yang Guo laughed, "That's the advantage of having such profound feelings. If I got over you and only cried at the Broken Heart Cliff then went off, I would never see you again."

Xiao Longnu said, "This is fate." Both of them came back from death to life and were finally reunited, so they were very thankful for their good fortune.

They felt sad for a while. Yang Guo then asked, "Then what happened after you jumped down?"

Xiao Longnu said, "I was swept unconscious into the cave and carried to this place, so I lived here. This place is devoid of animals but there were plenty of fish in the lake and fruits

on the trees but there was no cloth so I had to use tree bark to make clothes.”

Yang Guo said, “When you were struck by the “Soul Freezing Needles” and the poison entered your major accupoints, your condition was near-fatal. How did you get well down here?” Yang Guo looked carefully at her and saw her snow-white face had no traces of blood and the black cloud between her eyes had disappeared.

Xiao Longnu said, “After I lived here for several days the poison took effect and my whole body was on fire and I almost could not take it, but I remembered that on our wedding night you taught me how to reverse my chi flow on the “Chilled Jade Bed”. It couldn’t neutralize the poison but could relieve the symptoms. The water here is icy cold and the chill could penetrate the bones, so I got back into the water and stayed for a while and found that the effects were amazing. Thereafter I often went to the lake’s bank and looked up, hoping to get some news from you. One day a few Jade Bees flew down to the lake. They were left behind by the Old Urchin (Zhou Botong). I treated them like friends and built a few nests for them. Soon they multiplied. I consumed the Jade Bees’ honey and the white fish in the lake and found my discomfort decreasing. So the Jade Bees’ honey and the white fish have anti-poison properties and when consumed as food would increase the time interval between the poison’s reactions. At first it reacted twice a day, then once every few days, then once every few months, then for the past five or six years it never reacted again, so I guess I’m cured now.”

Yang Guo happily said, “So good will be rewarded with good. That year if you hadn’t given the Jade Bees to the Old Urchin he wouldn’t have brought them here and you wouldn’t have been saved.”

Xiao Longnu said, "When I got better, I missed you but the cliff walls were several hundred meters high and were straight and sheer, how could I get up? So I used the thorns on the flowers and tattooed the words 'I'm at the bottom of Passionless Valley' on the bees' wings. I tattooed several thousand bees but I got no response so I feared that I would never see you again."

Yang Guo slapped his leg and said, "I'm too careless. Every time I came to the Passionless Valley I always saw the bees but I never caught one to examine it or I could have kept you from a few years of misery."

Xiao Longnu laughed, "This is just a plan I used because I couldn't think of anything else. Actually who would think a bee would have words on its wings? The words are also so small; even if a hundred of them flew past your eyes you wouldn't notice the words. I was just hoping that a bee might get trapped in a spider's web and then you would see the words. When you saw them you would remember our relationship and rescue me." What she did not know was that the words were discovered by Zhou Botong, who did nothing, and the meaning was deciphered by Huang Rong when she saw them.

They chatted for half a day and Xiao Longnu went back into the hut to grill a big fish. The lake's water was very cold and the white fish were smallish but tasty and filling. Yang Guo ate the fish and felt some warmth in his stomach, making it very comfortable. He then told her what he did for the past sixteen years. He roamed Jianghu and did many heroic deeds so his life was more action-packed than Xiao Longnu's who lived in the lonely valley. Xiao Longnu never bothered about all the action and was contented with just looking at Yang Guo. So she smiled and listened to his exciting adventures and forgot everything he said soon after. Yang Guo however was very inquisitive and asked everything, including how she

caught the fish and built the hut and showed great interest in every detail, making it seem like the small valley was actually more interesting than the whole world. The two of them talked throughout the night and into the next morning before sleeping. They woke up in the afternoon and Yang Guo said, "Long'er, should we stay here until we're old or should we go back to the wonderful world?"

Xiao Longnu would have preferred to live here peacefully with Yang Guo but she knew he liked noise and excitement. Although she loved him deeply she was reluctant to leave this place so she said, "Let's go up and take a look, if things are bad out there we can always come back, but... but it'd be difficult to get up."

They dived back into the lake, through the cave and went back to the bank. They saw a long rope going all the way up and many random footprints by the bank. There was even a makeshift fireplace which had not died out. Yang Guo said, "Ah, some people came to look for us but couldn't get past the lake." He walked around and saw some words carved on a large tree which said, "Yideng, Yaoshi, Botong, Yinggu, Rong, Ying and Wushuang couldn't find Yang Guo so we went back."

Yang Guo was touched and said, "They've not forgotten me." Xiao Longnu said, "No one would forget you." Yang Guo said, "Although they came here, they did not fall into the lake with great speed and hence couldn't go deep enough to see the underwater cave. If I also came down with a rope, I wouldn't have been able to find you either." Xiao Longnu said, "I already said all this coincidence is due to fate." Yang Guo shook his head and laughed, "This is called 'With sincerity, one can cut rocks or gold'."

He tugged the rope to test it and it felt firmly attached, so he said, "Let me go up first to see if that Fawang is still there."

But he remembered that Reverend Yideng, Island Master Huang and Zhou Botong were all present so Fawang must be miles away by now. Then he asked, "Do you still have any martial skills? If you can't climb, I can carry you up." Xiao Longnu smiled, "Although I didn't improve even slightly for the past sixteen years, I still retain much of my old skills." Yang Guo laughed. He grabbed the rope and jumped, moving several meters a second. Xiao Longnu followed suit and they got out in no time.

They stood side-by-side at the Broken Heart Cliff and looked at the words carved into the rock face by Xiao Longnu years ago; it seemed like a lifetime ago to them. They looked at each other and giggled with joy and forgot all their troubles of sixteen years ago.

Yang Guo plucked a Dragon Girl Flower and placed it in her hair and the color contrasted with her face beautifully. He could not decide if the flower added vibrancy to her or she added beauty to the flower.

oOo

Huang Yaoshi was explaining the "Twenty-eight Star Formation" at the top of Xiangyang's city wall for the battle with Fawang. Guo Jing found Lu Wenhuan and requested him to give the order for Huang Yaoshi to take command of the soldiers. At this time many of the heroes who attended the 'Heroes' Meet had already left, but there were still many able people in the city.

Huang Yaoshi said, "The Mongolians are using 40,000 soldiers to surround the tower. If we use more soldiers to defeat them it wouldn't require much skill. So we'll also use forty thousand soldiers. In Sun Zi's Art of War, using surrounding the enemy when you outnumber him ten to one is no big deal, but it needs some skill to surround the enemy one on one." He stood on the command post and said, "This

“Twenty-eight Star Formation” follows the Five Elements.” He waved the command flag and briefed them. Then he said, “The changes are complex and you can’t be familiar with this in a single day. So for this battle we must appoint five skilled martial arts experts familiar with the Five Elements to command the five divisions. Everyone is to obey their commands to carry out the formation.” They all waited eagerly.

Huang Yaoshi said, “The central division represents Earth and it shall be commanded by Guo Jing with eight thousand troops. Its mission is to rescue Guo Xiang and not to battle the enemy. All the soldiers are to carry a bag of sand on their backs to put out the fire if necessary.” Guo Jing received the order and stood aside.

Huang Yaoshi continued, “The south division represents Fire and it shall be commanded by Reverend Yideng with eight thousand troops. One thousand men will escort the commander and the other seven thousand will be split into 7 battalions commanded by Zhu Ziliu, Wu Santong, The Fisherman, the Wu brothers, Yelu Yan and Wanyan Ping.” Reverend Yideng accepted the command.

Huang Yaoshi continued, “The north division represents Water and it shall be commanded by Huang Rong with eight thousand troops. One thousand men will escort the commander and the other seven thousand will be split into seven battalions commanded by Yelu Qi, Elder Liang, Guo Fu and other senior Beggar Clan members.” Huang Rong accepted the command. This division was made up mainly of Beggar Clan members and all were tried and valiant veterans.

Huang Yaoshi then said, “The east division represents Wood and it shall be commanded by me, Old Heretic Huang, and there shall also be eight thousand men under me. All my

disciples are dead with the exception of Cheng Ying and Sha Gu, but they are not present.” So he appointed six heroes who had attended the ‘Heroes’ Meet to command the battalions in his division. He said, “The east division shall also be divided into eight battalions of one thousand men each and 1 battalion will escort me.”

Finally he appointed the west division’s commander, saying, “This division shall be commanded by Quanzhen Sect Leader Li Zhichang...” As he said this, everyone felt that in terms of martial arts, this division’s commander had the weakest martial arts among the five divisions. Suddenly someone shouted, “Old Heretic Huang, how could you ignore me?” Everyone turned around and saw Zhou Botong. Huang Yaoshi said, “Brother Zhou, you’re injured, you shouldn’t exert yourself, I originally wanted to appoint you to this position but...”

Zhou Botong said, “It’s such a minor injury; it’s not important. I’ll take it. Zhi Chang, you dare to vie with me?” Li Zhichang bowed and said, “I do not.” Zhou Botong laughed, “Good, I knew you wouldn’t dare.” He then took the command token from Li Zhichang. Huang Yaoshi just said, “Brother Zhou, be careful. You shall take eight thousand troops and one thousand of them shall be under Yinggu to escort you. The other seven battalions shall be commanded by Li Zhichang and other third Generation Quanzhen disciples. Your division represents Metal.”

After appointing the commanders he ordered the sergeant-major to prepare the weapons and equipment. He then waved his command flag and the forty thousand men got into formation. He shouted, “Legend has it that “Twenty-eight Celestial Generals” subdued the Demons long, long ago. Although we are not some Heavenly Army, we shall repel the invaders and protect our land from the Mongolians or we

shall die trying!" Everyone cheered like thunder and the five divisions left the city in all directions.

The west division marched out and each soldier carried a wooden pole on his back and they attacked the tower. One thousand of them carried shields and warded off the arrows while the remaining seven thousand threw down their poles and quickly built a structure which followed Huang Yaoshi's diagram based on the Five Elements and Eight Trigrams. Soon they blockaded off the eastern side of the tower.

The west division was made up mainly of Quanzhen disciples and they were familiar with the Dipper Formation, so their swords flashed like lightning and they formed groups of seven and platoons of forty-nine darting left and right, causing the Mongolians to see blurry images and could only fend them off with arrows.

The north division roared in and Huang Rong, together with the Beggars' Clan members, brought hoses with them and they sprayed poison onto the Mongol troops. The poison caused severe pain and corroded the skin. The Mongols could not take it and retreated south.

The south division appeared through a great cloud of smoke and the 8,000 troops led by Yideng attacked with fire. The soldiers had some sort of fire thrower which spewed out flames at the enemy soldiers. The Mongol troops saw that things were really going wrong and were pushed towards the centre. Guo Jing and his eight thousand troops moved forward gradually and when they saw the Mongol soldiers thrown into confusion, they charged straight to the tower.

Suddenly an alarm was sounded and many heads popped up from the ground. The Mongols were also well-versed in warfare and they also placed more than ten thousand troops in ambush. Guo Jing saw this and knew it was a trap. The Mongol troops were already in chaos under the onslaught of

the “Twenty-eight Star Formation” and the Song troops were about to reach their objective; but now they could not advance.

The drums rolled like the rumbling thunder and the Song troops were engaged in a bitter fight with the Mongol troops. The soldiers protecting the tower were some of the best archers and their arrows descended like rain and hindered the advance of Guo Jing’s central division. Huang Yaoshi waved his flag and changed the formation; now it was Fire against Wood and Metal against Water.

The “Twenty-eight Star Formation” followed the principles of the Five Elements. The south division’s Yideng attacked the centre, Guo Jing’s central division attacked the west, Zhou Botong and the Quanzhen Sect attacked the north, Huang Rong and the Beggars’ Sect attacked the east and Huang Yaoshi’s division attacked the south. The formation’s status now was: Fire and Earth, Earth and Metal, Metal and Water, Water and Wood, Wood and Fire. The Song regiment only had forty thousand men but the formation was ingenious and the division commanders were highly skilled fighters. Moreover the Song soldiers were all grateful towards Guo Jing and Huang Rong, so they risked their lives to save his daughter. Even though the Mongolians outnumbered them almost two to one, the Mongolians could not fend them off.

They fought for a long time and Huang Yaoshi waved his flag again. One division withdrew to the central position, Guo Jing’s division attacked north again, Yideng’s division returned south, one division went west and another attacked the east. The formation changed and now the status was: Wood against Earth, Earth against Water, Water against Fire, Fire against Metal, and Metal against Wood.

The principles of the Five Elements seem mysterious but was actually discovered when the ancient Chinese people studied

the changes in the environment. The principles were derived from the Tao of the Yin and Yang, religious worship, medicine and mathematics etc. all depended on these. This was said to be unique in the whole world. The Mongols were brave and fierce warriors and their fighting skills were excellent. But their knowledge of such matters was rather shallow; how could they be a match for someone like Huang Yaoshi? After a few changes, the soldiers guarding the tower became very confused as they saw groups of Song troops moving back and forth and they did not know how to deal with them.

Fawang was watching the battle from atop the tower and was shocked. A long time ago even Huang Rong's "Stone Formation" gave him many difficulties. With Huang Yaoshi being ten times more knowledgeable than Huang Rong, how could he understand what was going on? The "Twenty-eight Star Formation" completely awed him and he saw that the casualties on his side were increasing rapidly. Guo Jing's division was getting closer to the tower every second. Although he had Guo Xiang in his power, he was reluctant to burn her alive. He glanced at her and saw that although she was tied up, her head was raised proudly and she showed no fear. Fawang said, "Little Guo Xiang, get your father to surrender quickly. I'll count from one to ten; if they don't surrender I'll order the tower to be set on fire."

Guo Xiang said, "If you love to count you can count to ten thousand for all I care."

Fawang angrily said, "You really think I won't burn you alive?"

Guo Xiang coldly said, "I just think you're pathetic."

Fawang shouted, "How?"

Guo Xiang said, "You can't beat my father and mother, you can't beat my grandfather, you can't beat Reverend Yideng,

you can't beat Zhou Botong and you can't beat my brother Yang Guo. All you're capable of is to tie me up here. I'm just a small fry in Xiangyang, so I don't deserve such despicable behavior. Fawang let me give you a piece of advice."

Fawang gritted his teeth and asked, "What?"

Guo Xiang said, "What use has a person like you got on Earth? Just jump off the tower and go to hell!" Guo Xiang was already past caring about life and death. She had a razor-sharp tongue and she had never lost an argument.

Fawang exploded with rage and screamed, "Guo Jing listen well! If you don't surrender I'll burn the tower!"

Guo Jing said, "Do you think I am the sort who will surrender?"

Huang Yaoshi shouted in Mongolian, "Jinlun Fawang, you're too stupid to beat this enemy. You can only bully small girls and you are not brave enough to fight us with real weapons. How can such a stupid and cowardly man be considered a hero? You were captured by us at the Passionless Valley and you kowtowed to Guo Xiang eighteen times and begged her to release you. You're an ungrateful bastard and you still dare to call yourself the First Protector of Mongolia?"

The part about kowtowing to Guo Xiang was rubbish. Huang Yaoshi was crafty and brilliant and got Huang Rong to translate all the stuff he just said before the battle and he quickly memorized everything. Now he said it with his chi and everyone heard this clearly through the din and Fawang did not know how to argue. The Mongolians always respected their warriors and despised cowards; now they heard what Huang Yaoshi said, they looked up at the tower with contempt. The two armies were fighting intensely when the Mongolians heard that their commander was such a

despicable man, and their morale fell. The Song troops were all brave and valiant and now had an advantage.

Fawang saw that something was wrong and shouted, "Guo Jing, listen. I'm going to count from one to ten. When I shout '10', your daughter will burn! 1... 2... 3... 4..." He paused slightly after every number and hoped that Guo Jing could not take it and be greatly distressed if he did not surrender.

Guo Jing, Huang Yaoshi, Yideng and Zhou Botong's divisions heard Fawang counting from the top of the tower. They saw a few hundred soldiers bearing torches at the foot of the tower, only waiting for the command to set everything alight. Everyone was getting anxious and charged toward the tower for all they were worth. But there were a few thousand archers firing arrows from the tower which severely impeded their advance. Under the rain of arrows, people like the Fisherman, Elder Liang and Wu Xiuwen were injured and some third Generation Quanzhen disciples were killed together with dozens of Beggar Clan members. The Song soldiers killed were beyond counting.

Before the battle Huang Rong told Guo Fu to take off the Soft Armour and give it to her grandfather. She expected a tough battle and did not want her father to get hurt in the process of saving Guo Xiang. Huang Yaoshi accepted it but secretly took it off and tricked Zhou Botong into putting it on. So although Zhou Botong was hit by many arrows he was not injured and he found this amusing. He went charging forward and attacked the archers with his palms, causing them to back off.

Then Fawang shouted, "... 8... 9... 10! Good, burn the tower!" In an instant the base of the tower was engulfed in flames and the thick smoke rose into the air. Guo Jing's eight thousand soldiers all had bags of sand on their backs but they could not get near the tower.

Huang Rong saw the thick black smoke and her face turned white. She waved her flag randomly and disorderly. Yelu Qi went forward to support her and said, "Mother-in-law, go behind the formation and rest, I'll save Sister Xiang even if it costs me my life."

At this time a thunderous roar came from afar. Many Mongolian soldiers from behind the formation appeared and attacked Xiangyang from two sides. "Long live the Khan!" The Mongol Khan was personally commanding the assault and the Mongol troops swarmed towards the city.

Guo Jing was carrying a spear and shield and had already advanced within a hundred feet of the tower. The Mongolian archers were unable to hold him off any longer and he looked like he would ascend the tower at any moment. Suddenly he heard a disturbance at the rear of the formation and thought, "Oh no, we've been tricked! The city has many soldiers but no able commanders, this is bad!"

When Guo Jing and Huang Yaoshi planned the battle they made sure the city was fully prepared for any sneak attack. But the Mongol soldiers at the tower were exceptionally tough and the Khan ignored the battle at the tower and attacked Xiangyang with his entire army. Guo Jing thought, "Saving the city is more important than saving my daughter!" He said loudly, "Father-in-law, let's not worry about Xiang'er, we must go back and attack the enemy."

Huang Yaoshi looked back and saw the smoke rising higher and Fawang walking down the tower, leaving Guo Xiang alone at the top. He decided that he could not sacrifice the whole city for Guo Xiang and sighed, "So be it!" He waved his command flag and the troops headed back to the city.

Guo Xiang, tied on top of the tower, saw that her parents and grandfather would be unable to save her. The heat was getting more intense. She knew the fire was spreading

quickly and she would be burned to death soon. She was rather fearful at first, but then she calmed down and looked at the beautiful scenery, thinking, "It's such a fun world, but I'm going to die soon. I wonder where Brother Yang is. Has he come up from the valley yet?"

She thought back to her meeting with Yang Guo and felt her life was not a waste. She was in grave danger but she did not bother about the battle at the foot of the tower. Suddenly there was roar from afar and it sounded like soldiers being killed by the thousands.

Guo Xiang was surprised because the roar was similar to Yang Guo's roar which made wild animals cower. She turned her head and saw the Mongol troops on the west and north falling and rolling away from two people. The soldiers were being swept aside with a force comparable to huge waves. Between the two people was a large eagle and it spread its wings generating a typhoon and the arrows fell harmlessly to the ground on contacting its wings. This bird was fierce and majestic and it was of course Yang Guo's Divine Eagle.

Guo Xiang was overjoyed and saw that one of the two people wore a green hat and yellow shirt and was definitely Yang Guo. The other was a beautiful lady who wore a white gown which floated in the wind. The two wielded long swords and the swords flashed together gracefully. They followed behind the eagle and charged to the tower. Guo Xiang shouted, "Big brother is this Xiao Longnu?"

The lady was obviously Xiao Longnu, but he was too far and did not hear Guo Xiang talking to him. The Divine Eagle cleared the path and deflected the arrows effortlessly; its wings were like iron but it was still slightly injured. The Mongol troops had never seen such a fierce and powerful animal before and tried to stab it but were struck by Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu's swords and they fell away.

Yang Guo shouted, "Sister, don't be afraid, I'll save you." He saw the lower half of the tower on fire and jumped lightly, reaching the ladder and he quickly climbed up. Suddenly a strong wind generated by a palm struck downwards – it was Fawang.

Yang Guo sheathed his sword and used his palm to intercept the blow from Fawang. When the two huge forces collided, both of them rocked about and the wooden ladder trembled like it was going to break. Both were shocked and both praised his opponent: "I haven't seen him for sixteen years, I never imagined his internal strength would have increased this much."

Yang Guo saw that the situation was dire and would not allow him to compete with palm strength at the ladder again. He drew his sword again and attacked Fawang's legs. Fawang was standing above and if he used his wheels to fight he would have to bend over and that would put him at a disadvantage. Furthermore his wheels were shorter than the sword, so he turned around and decided to go back up to the platform again. Yang Guo raised his sword and attacked him ferociously from behind; every stance was swift as lightning. Fawang did not turn around but used his ears to determine where the attacks came from. He used a wheel to block every stance; it was as though he had eyes on the back of his head. Yang Guo praised him, "Damn monk; very impressive!"

Fawang was standing on top of the platform and immediately retaliated with one wheel. Yang Guo avoided it and counter-attacked with his sword. He dived towards Fawang in the air. Fawang used his golden wheel to block him and his silver wheel was about to strike the blade.

Just a moment ago they exchanged one stance and Yang Guo felt that the palm energy of Fawang was solid, robust and strong. He had never encountered such power amongst his

former adversaries. He was surprised by this. He had trained in the waves of the ocean and was capable of withstanding the strong forces of the tide's waves. Sixteen years ago Fawang was no match for him; but today, after exchanging one blow, he was almost unable to withstand that blast.

Seeing that the wheels were about to make contact with his blade, he did not retract his sword. He wanted to test the internal strength of Fawang. The wheels and sword collided with a loud clang. The huge powers collided with each other and Yang Guo's sword broke in two while the wheels flew out of Fawang's hands. The wheels fell to the ground smashing three Mongolian archers. Yang Guo was shocked and thought, "For sixteen years I have not used the heavy iron sword; I see that I am too overconfident today."

In order to perform the "Jade Maiden Swordplay", Yang Guo could not use his heavy iron sword; therefore he used an ordinary sword instead. When his blade made contact with the wheels of the Fawang it broke immediately.

After exchanging one blow both leapt aside and their arms felt numb. Then Fawang took out his iron and bronze wheels and attacked again. Yang Guo did not have any other weapon, so he generated his strength to his right sleeve and whisked out. He also used his left palm to attack Fawang.

Guo Xiang shouted, "Old monk, I told you before. You're no match for him! If you're really that powerful, why do you have to use your weapons? Can't you fight him empty-handed? You're a disgrace!" Fawang grunted and did not answer but increased the power and speed of his stances.

Huang Yaoshi, Guo Jing and Huang Rong were leading their troops back to defend Xiangyang, but when they saw Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu and the Divine Eagle fighting their way towards the platform, they had hopes again of saving Guo Xiang.

Huang Yaoshi waved his command flag and ordered four thousand soldiers from the east, south, west, north and central divisions forming a total of twenty thousand soldiers to return and attack the invading Mongolian troops. The remaining soldiers were to assist Yang Guo in saving Guo Xiang. Although the Song troops were outnumbered their spirits were raised when they saw Yang Guo on the platform. Each fought one against ten and the Mongolian archers kept shooting their arrows and held their ground firmly. Each time the Song soldiers advanced forward they were soon pushed back by the uncountable arrows.

The battle at the gates of Xiangyang was also at its' peak. Governor Lu Wenhuan was too afraid to lead the armies; he wore his armour and hid in the government office with his two beloved concubines. He was trembling madly and kept stammering, "Merciful Avalokitesvara... please protect m...m...my entire family...Merci... merciful Avalokitesvara..." His two concubines were patting his chest and wiping away his saliva.

The scouts came and reported, "Another ten thousand enemy soldiers have reinforced the attacking troops at the east gate... At the north gate the enemy troops have put up the ladders..."

Lu Wenhuan rolled his eyes with fear and kept asking, "Is Master Guo back yet? Haven't the Mongolians retreated yet?"

By this time Yang Guo, using one arm, had fought more than two hundred stances with Fawang. Both of their martial arts were quite different from each other and the battle kept intensifying. The entire platform was shaken by their wheels and palm. The smoke coming from the bottom of the platform also thickened and soon a black cloud covered the platform. Although Yang Guo was not using a weapon he was not at a disadvantage. Fawang felt the platform shaking lightly and

knew that the fire had started to consume one of the support pillars of the platform. It would only be a question of time before the platform collapsed and then he, Yang Guo and Guo Xiang would all die together. Also he saw that the techniques of Yang Guo were quite marvelous and feared that after another hundred stances or so he would be defeated by Yang Guo. In this dire situation he attacked Yang Guo's right shoulder with his iron wheel and when Yang Guo was about to avoid that wheel he threw his bronze wheel towards Guo Xiang's face. Since she was tied to a pole, it was impossible for her to dodge that wheel.

Yang Guo was horrified and leapt towards Guo Xiang and used his sleeve to whisk the bronze wheel away. However, when two experts fought, it was unwise to be distracted and Yang Guo's attention was on Guo Xiang, leaving himself unguarded. Fawang struck out with his iron wheel the sharp edges were aimed at Yang Guo's left leg. In mid-air Yang Guo frantically kicked Fawang's wrist with his right leg. Fawang twisted his wheel around and Yang Guo could not avoid it and his right leg was cut. Blood immediately flowed from his wound and his injury was not slight. Guo Xiang called out in fear and Fawang took out his lead wheel. With two wheels in his hands he attacked Guo Xiang again from the top and bottom. He knew, that although Yang Guo was injured, he could not overcome him at the moment. So he deliberately launched a fake attack on Guo Xiang and by doing so Yang Guo would try to protect her with all his might. In a few moments Yang Guo was in a dangerous position and could only defend and no longer attack.

Guo Xiang shouted, "Don't bother about me now! Just kill this old monk to avenge me!" Yang Guo called out in pain, as his right shoulder was cut again by a wheel.

Xiao Longnu and the Divine Eagle were standing on the ground together with Zhou Botong and they prevented the

archers from shooting arrows at Guo Xiang. Her attention was entirely focused on Yang Guo, even while she was killing those soldiers. When she saw him drenched in blood her heart skipped a beat. It was like her soul left her body; the ladder was consumed by the fire and there was no way for her to go up and help. Her mind went blank and she just raised her sword and was unaware of where she was and what she was doing there.

Whenever Yang Guo was faced with a great, powerful adversary he would use his "Melancholic Sad Palms" to defeat his opponent. This style was linked to his emotional state, but now he was newly reunited with Xiao Longnu and his heart was filled with bliss and happiness. There was not a trace of melancholy or sadness any longer. He was now faced with a dangerous situation and was using this very style. But somehow the influence of melancholy and longing was gone; every move and every stance he made was the same as in the past but the power of it was greatly diminished.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong saw Yang Guo's battle against Fawang and saw him being injured; unfortunately they could not rush over to help him. Huang Rong suddenly thought of something and took Yelu Qi's sword and gave it to Guo Jing. She said loudly, "Shoot it over to Guo'er." Guo Jing took the sword and used two iron bows and placed the sword in between. He aimed and shot the sword towards Yang Guo. A bright flash seared through the sky and a loud whooshing sound was heard.

Yang Guo heard the whooshing sound and used his right sleeve to curl around the sword and immediately used his left hand to wield it. He thrust the sword through the two wheels of Fawang. Fawang twisted his wheels and the sword was broken again. Everyone saw what happened and was stunned.

Yang Guo knew it was in vain; he could not rescue Guo Xiang by himself. He would probably die here as well. He looked tragically at Xiao Longnu and said, "Long'er, farewell. Take care..." At this moment Fawang used his iron wheel to advance forward, wanting to strike Yang Guo on the skull. Yang Guo had given up all hope; he casually whisked his sleeve and struck out his palm and it smashed Fawang directly on the shoulder.

Zhou Botong who was standing below shouted, "Good! That's one very impressive 'Entangled by the Web of Love'." Yang Guo was stunned for a moment and then he realized he was feeling lost and hopeless and he unintentionally used the stance "Entangled by the Web of Love". The heart is the most important factor of this style - it commands the arm and the arm commands the palm. That day, in the "Hundred Flowers Valley", Zhou Botong did not feel sadness and melancholy and therefore he could not grasp the essence behind this style. When Yang Guo was reunited with Xiao Longnu, this style lost its essence. When Yang Guo faced death and parting with Xiao Longnu the sorrow and melancholy suddenly surged forth in his heart and immediately boosted the power of the "Melancholic Sad Palms".

Fawang was about to be victorious when, suddenly, he was hit on the shoulder. His chest hurt greatly and he trembled. He was furious and surprised and instantly attacked again.

Yang Guo backed away and retaliated with "In A State Of Disunity", "Irrational Direction", "The Settled Cessation" and another move quickly followed these three attacks. It was the "The Meaningless Wanderer". This stance was a kick, but it was a most elusive attack. Fawang could only vaguely see a leg; it was there, but it was not. He could not avoid this kick and he suffered a heavy blow to his chest. He coughed up blood and fell. Both armies yelled, the Song yelled with joy and the Mongolians called out in surprise.

Note: Here we present the original and the third [final?] edition versions of the end of Yang Guo and Jinlun Fawang's battle.

1st / 2nd Edition:

By now the tower was crumbling and Yang Guo knew he had no time to untie Guo Xiang, so he quickly smashed the pole she was tied to and carrying everything – girl, pole and all – jumped off the tower. The Divine Eagle jumped up and they landed on its back. They landed safely only just in time. The tower came crashing down.

Fawang was kicked off the platform and was injured but not fatally. He swallowed his pain and rolled away, wanting to get up. Suddenly someone laughed and jumped onto his back. He was pinned to the ground and it seemed like a thousand needles pierced through him. It was Zhou Botong and his Soft Armour was like a porcupine. Fawang was severely injured and he could not move. The tower collapsed and, as Zhou Botong leapt away, a huge beam struck Fawang on his back.

Huang Rong saw that her daughter had escaped death and was filled with emotions. She was very grateful towards Yang Guo and was willing to die for him. She quickly ran forward and cut the ropes. Guo Jing, Yideng, Huang Yaoshi and Yelu Qi were all greatly impressed.

3rd Edition Ending:

The platform shook greatly now and was about to collapse. If it collapsed entirely now Guo Xiang was bound to die. Suddenly, Fawang found his benevolence again and he leapt up and cut the ropes tying Guo Xiang using his iron wheel. He took her in his arms and said to her, "Call me Master one more time." Guo Xiang looked up and saw tears in his eyes. She called loudly, "Master!"

Fawang shouted, "Yang Guo, catch her!"

Yang Guo saw Fawang throwing Guo Xiang to him and used his sleeve to catch her and his left arm to support her. He jumped down with her. The Divine Eagle spread its' wings and leaped up; although it could not fly it could leap about 3 or 4 meters into the air. Guo Xiang and Yang Guo landed on the back of the eagle and were descended on it. At this time the platform was collapsing and the Eagle could not deal with the weight of two persons and fell down. Yang Guo gently pushed Guo Xiang aside and said, "Watch out!"

Guo Xiang performed the technique "The Flying Swallow Circling Away" and touched down. Seeing she was close to being safe, Huang Rong screamed, "Dodge! Faster!"

A heavy burning beam came crashing down towards her. Guo Xiang was shocked and fell down. Huang Rong and Yang Guo wanted to rush over to rescue her but they were too far away. Furthermore, they were blocked by Mongolian soldiers. Seeing that it was too late Huang Rong fainted.

Guo Xiang had her hands on the ground and wanted to leap away again, but she was trapped by the fiery beam. Her clothes were on fire too and the smoke was choking her. She closed her eyes and awaited death. Suddenly she heard someone landing next to her; she opened her eyes and saw Fawang. He was kneeling down on one knee and using his hands to lift the heavy, burning beam. He generated a large force from his "Dragon Elephant Wisdom Dexterity" and hurled the beam away.

Although the beam was very heavy his "Dragon Elephant Wisdom Dexterity" was awesome and he generated every bit of his remaining incredible internal strength. The beam flew into the sky like a red blazing dragon. Both Song and Mongol soldiers looked up. The Mongolian soldiers ran away fearing that the beam would land on them. A gap appeared in their

formation and Yang Guo helped Huang Rong up and dashed forward.

Guo Xiang escaped from death and was helping Fawang up. She was calling, "Master, Master!"

Fawang opened his eyes and said, "Good, good! I have finally managed to convince you..." He coughed up blood and could not finish talking. His blood splattered on Guo Xiang's clothes and she saw pieces of the platform falling down on them. She tried her best to lift Fawang and move him to safety. Yang Guo saw that she could not lift Fawang and helped her to drag him away from the falling debris. Fawang kept coughing up blood and looked at Guo Xiang; he smiled and closed his eyes for the final time. Guo Xiang embraced his body and was devastated, she cried, "Master, Master!"

Yang Guo saw Fawang sacrificing his own life to save Guo Xiang. In doing so, Fawang earned his respect and he bowed to the body.

Huang Rong saw her beloved daughter safe again, she hugged her and tears of joy flowed freely. She was most thankful toward Yang Guo and Fawang. Guo Jing, Huang Yaoshi and Reverend Yideng were also touched by the actions of Fawang and were also very grateful to him.

End of Excerpts

The Mongol soldiers saw that their commander was dead and they were thrown into great chaos. The five divisions attacked them again and this time they were totally defeated.

Guo Jing waved and shouted, "Let's go back and save Xiangyang, then kill their Khan!" The Song army cheered and turned around and charged towards the Mongol troops attacking the city.

Xiao Longnu tore off some cloth and dressed Yang Guo's wound. Her hands were trembling and she could not speak. Yang Guo smiled, "You suffered more from your worries than I from the fight."

The Song troops gave a thunderous yell and formed up into five divisions again and attacked the Mongol army. Yang Guo saw that the enemy was orderly and unyielding and they outnumbered the Song army many times. Although the Song army attacked them like mighty waves, they still could not move the enemy.

Yang Guo shouted, "The scum of a Khan isn't dead yet and the enemy isn't defeated yet. Let's fight again. Are you tired?" He spoke the last few words gently and softly. Xiao Longnu just smiled and said, "You say go then we'll go."

Then they heard a young girl say, "Sister-in-law, you're ravishing." It was Guo Xiang.

Xiao Longnu turned around and laughed, "Sister thanks you for praying for our reunion. Your brother praised you and dragged me to Xiangyang to meet you."

Guo Xiang sighed, "Only you are worthy of him."

Xiao Longnu took her hand and was very friendly to her. Xiao Longnu was usually cold and indifferent to everyone, but since Yang Guo heaped praise on Guo Xiang and told how she jumped off the cliff to make him promise not to commit suicide, Xiao Longnu treated her differently.

Yang Guo ran past some stray horses and said, "I'll cut a way through. Let's go together!" He hopped onto the horse and rode off. Xiao Longnu and Guo Xiang took a horse each and followed behind. The three of them galloped south and saw several hundred Mongol soldiers setting up the ladders at the south gate and climbing up like ants.

The three of them got onto a small hill and looked around and saw a few thousand Mongol troops surrounding Yelu Qi and his three hundred men. The Mongolians used long spears and chopped down on Yelu Qi's cavalry. Guo Fu led a company and attempted to rescue him but was blocked by two thousand Mongol troops. The couple longed for each other from afar but could not meet. Guo Fu saw that her husband's troops were decreasing rapidly and her heart sank as she knew that once surrounded by a large army, even a highly skilled martial artist could do nothing.

Yang Guo said, "Guo Fu, if you kowtow to me three times I will rescue your husband." Because of Guo Fu's proud, overbearing and obnoxious behavior, she would rather die than kowtow to him and admit his superiority. But now, seeing that her husband was in grave danger, she did not hesitate and immediately got off her horse and fell to her knees, knocking her head on the ground.

Yang Guo was shocked and quickly dragged her up. He regretted saying that and said, "I'm just teasing you, don't mind me. Brother Yelu and I are close friends, how can I ignore his plight?" He jumped from the hill and gathered as many horses as he could and formed them up in two rows. He mounted a horse and held all the reins in one hand, yelling and charging into the enemy's formation.

Yang Guo's two rows of horses followed the "Multiple Horse Formation" originated in the Song army. However the horses were not trained in this and did not move in a straight path and followed Yang Guo only because he held on to the reins tightly. They galloped through the formation and Yang Guo utilized his advanced qing gong (lightness skill) and was jumping back and forth on the horses' backs. The Mongols had never seen such an awesome riding skill before and their lack of reaction allowed Yang Guo to pass through their

formation without resistance. Yang Guo grabbed a large banner and fastened it on one of the saddles.

The Mongol soldiers shouted and tried to block him but Yang Guo swept the banner and knocked three officers down from their horses. He saw that Yelu Qi was just a few meters away and shouted, "Brother Yelu, jump up!" He thrust out the banner and Yelu Qi jumped, landing on the banner. He mounted a horse and the two of them broke out of the encirclement together.

Yelu Qi panted and said, "Brother Yang, thanks for saving me, but my subordinates are still trapped and I don't want to desert them." Yang Guo was moved and said, "You go grab a big banner too." Then he set both banners on fire. Yelu Qi said, "Brilliant!" He went forward and snatched a banner and lit it against Yang Guo's banner. They shouted and charged into the enemy lines, waving the flaming banners about.

The two flaming banners flying around struck fear in the enemy troops. All those who went forward to stop them suffered serious burns. The tide was turning and the Mongol troops had no choice but to retreat. Yelu Qi's battalion had only about seventy people left and they all charged together, finally managing to break out of the encirclement. Yelu Qi assembled the remnants of his soldiers and took them up a mountain to rest.

Guo Fu went up to Yang Guo and bowed lowly to him, saying, "Brother Yang, I've caused trouble for you my whole life but you're open-minded and magnanimous. You returned my resentment with benevolence, saving..." Her voice became hoarse and she could not continue. Yang Guo had saved her life several times in the past and knew she owed him a debt of gratitude. But she had always loathed him, thinking that he was always eager to show off his martial arts and did not really intend to save her. Only now, when he saved her

husband, she felt truly grateful and realized her past mistakes.

Yang Guo hastily returned the bow and said, "Sister Fu, we grew up together, although we quarreled a lot, we've always been as close as siblings. If you no longer hate me or despise me I will be very happy."

Guo Fu was stunned and the past events flashed past in her mind. She thought, "Do I really hate him? The Wu brothers were always trying to gain my favour but he never bothered about me. If he had treated me better I would have been willing to die for him. Why did I hate him without any reason for so many years? Is it because I always think of him and miss him but he'd never paid any attention to me?"

For the past twenty years, even she did not understand her own heart and always treated him like her enemy. Deep in her heart she actually had deep feelings for him. But Yang Guo could not understand her; even she could not understand herself.

Now her hate was gone she suddenly realized that she was actually very concerned about him. She thought, "When he charged into the enemy formation to save Brother Qi, who did I worry for more? I really cannot say." At this time the clash of the ongoing fierce battle could be heard and she suddenly understood herself, "When he gave Sister Xiang such great presents on her birthday, why did I hate him to the bones? Guo Fu, ah Guo Fu, you're jealous of your own little sister! He treated Sister Xiang so well but didn't even acknowledge your presence."

While she was lost in thought about this, her anger flared up again and she stared hard at Yang Guo and Guo Xiang. Then she woke up, thinking, "Why do I still care about all this? I'm a married woman now and Brother Qi treats me so well!" She gave a long sigh. Although she did not lack for anything

since she was young, deep in her heart she felt a strange void. She always got whatever she wanted but could never get what she really desired most. In her whole life she did not know why she was always so hot-tempered and why she was always sulking when everyone was happy.

Guo Fu's face flushed red and then paled white as she thought about her heart's affairs. However Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu, Guo Xiang and Yelu Qi were all observing the ongoing battle at Xiangyang. The front line soldiers had already scaled the city wall. Guo Jing and Huang Yaoshi's army attacked their flank heavily but the Mongol army was too large and their formation remained intact. The Khan directed all his forces to attack the city and the defenders inside were getting more disorderly and could not hold the enemy much longer. Guo Xiang anxiously cried, "Brother, what do we do? What do we do?"

Yang Guo thought, "I'm fortunate enough to see Long'er again and Heaven has been very kind to me. Even if I die today I wouldn't regret it. Dying for one's country is the greatest honour for a true hero." He became alert and said, "Brother Yelu, let's fight the enemy again." Yelu Qi said, "Nothing could be better." Xiao Longnu and Guo Xiang also said, "Let's go!" Yang Guo said, "OK! I'll lead and you will wield long spears and follow behind." Yelu Qi relayed the command to his company and everyone grabbed a few spears.

Yang Guo took a spear and jumped onto a horse, galloping off with the Divine Eagle running at his side and using its wings to deflect any incoming arrows. Xiao Longnu, Yelu Qi, Guo Fu and Guo Xiang followed closely behind. Yang Guo dashed straight to the Khan's banner. Yelu Qi was shocked and thought since the Khan was personally commanding the attack, all his elite guards must be there protecting him. There were only about a hundred Song soldiers with them -

this was suicide. Then he remembered his life was saved by Yang Guo and he would follow him to the ends of the Earth.

This company moved extremely fast and reached Xiangyang city in the blink of an eye. Mengke's (The Khan) guards saw Yang Guo coming swiftly and fiercely towards them and so they sent two hundred men ahead to stop him. Yang Guo threw his spear and it pierced right through a company commander's chest. He took a spear from Yelu Qi and killed the other company commander. The Mongol guards panicked and Yang Guo tore through their formation. All the soldiers were alarmed and held their weapons tightly and swarmed forward to block him. He threw a spear at every man he saw and killed them instantly. His left arm's superhuman strength was developed when he trained against the mighty waves of the sea. The spears he threw could pierce rocks; obviously it could fly through flesh and blood. Every throw of his was aimed at an officer and he threw seventeen spears, all penetrating the officers' armour and killing them.

This sudden attack was like a bolt from the blue and the legions of Mongol troops at the foot of Xiangyang city could not stop him. He shot right through their formation and came right up to the Khan himself.

Mengke's guards dashed forward to block him, disregarding their own lives. A body of armored guards rushed together and formed a wall in front of the Khan. Yang Guo reached out to take a spear from Yelu Qi but he grabbed thin air. The spear had been knocked away by some Mongol warrior. The Khan's face turned as white as sheet and he immediately rode off. Yang Guo shouted, stepped up on the horse's back, then threw himself forward. Some Mongol soldiers thrust their spears toward him desperately, but Yang Guo somersaulted in mid-air and used his internal strength to snatch all their spears away.

The Khan saw the situation was very dangerous and quickly whipped his horse and galloped away. The horse he was riding was hand-picked from the best horses of the Mongolian stables and was swift as a dragon and could fly like the wind. It was nicknamed the 'Flying Cloud Horse' and was superior to Guo Jing's 'Sweating Blood Horse'. The horse flew on the plains and Yang Guo, using his qing gong, tried to chase him. The Mongol troops behind hurriedly pursued Yang Guo.

All the soldiers, on both sides, saw this and everyone just stopped fighting to watch what would happen next.

Yang Guo saw the Khan riding away and was happy, thinking he could catch up with him. However this 'Flying Cloud Horse' was extremely fast and seemed to be gliding along on the plains. Yang Guo was getting more anxious as the Khan got further away from him. He quickly bent down to pick up a spear and threw it at the Khan.

The spear flew like a meteor and everyone held their breath in anticipation. The horse galloped even faster and just as the spear was about to hit the Khan it lost its propulsive force and stuck into the ground. The Song army cursed while the Mongol army cheered.

Now Guo Jing, Huang Rong, Huang Yaoshi, Zhou Botong and the others were too far away and could only stare in desperation. The Mongol army had tens of thousands of troops but they could only cheer the Khan on as they could not catch up with his horse.

Mengke looked back and saw Yang Guo getting further and further behind him and was less worried and quickly rode towards a legion. The legion cheered and came forward to welcome him. If he reached them, even with Yang Guo's skills he would be no match for an entire legion.

Yang Guo was starting to despair when he suddenly thought, "The spear is too heavy and can't go that far, why not use a stone?" He leaned over and picked up two stones and shot them out forcefully with his internal strength. The stones cut through the air like bullets and they hit the horse on the back. The horse neighed in pain and reared up, throwing its rider into the air.

Although Mengke (Meng-ge) was the emperor of the Mongolians, he had ridden horses and trained in archery since he was young, just like Genghis Khan and his father. He conquered the European territories on horse-back. Though he was thrown into the air, he did not panic and steadied himself back on the horse. He grabbed a bow and hooked his legs firmly onto the horse. He then turned his body and shot an arrow at Yang Guo.

Yang Guo ducked and quickly picked up a larger stone and shot it out with all his strength. The stone flew like a missile, ripped through the Khan and emerged from his chest, shattering on impact. The Khan's organs were crushed and he fell off his horse dead.

The Mongol army saw their Khan fall from the horse and they were stunned. Guo Jing immediately gave the command to counter-attack and all the Song troops rushed out from the city. The Song troops formed up in the "Twenty-eight Star Formation" again and attacked the Mongol army. The Mongol army was now in total chaos and they fled without their weapons and trampled one another trying to retreat. The countless Mongol dead lay scattered throughout the plains and the remnants scurried north.

Guo Jing and the Song army pursued them, then suddenly they saw a Mongol army appear in the west and its formation was orderly. The main banner bore the insignia of Khubilai. Both Guo Jing and Khubilai knew something was wrong. Guo

Jing knew the fleeing soldiers could not have re-grouped so fast, while Khubilai knew something had happened to the Khan's army. Khubilai quickly ordered a withdrawal. Guo Jing and the Song army pursued them for 30 li but could not catch up. Moreover Lu Wenhuan had sent his officials to summon Guo Jing back to the city. The Song army withdrew as well.

Ever since the Mongols opened the campaign with the Song Empire, they had never suffered such a disastrous defeat – they even lost their Khan in the battle. The Khan did not appoint an heir before his death and all the generals vied for the Khan's position. Khubilai ordered his army back north. He then battled his brothers for the position. Finally, Khubilai emerged as the victor in the civil war and became Khubilai Khan. However after the civil war the Mongols did not have the resources to launch another invasion on the Song Empire. Xiangyang would be safe from the Mongolians until they launched another campaign thirteen years later.

Guo Jing led the army back to Xiangyang and Lu Wenhuan was waiting at the city gate with the remaining soldiers, welcoming the return of the victors. The citizens of Xiangyang also came out to welcome them with wine.

Guo Jing took Yang Guo's hand and raised a cup of good wine and offered a toast to him, saying, "Guo'er, you did such a great thing today; from now everyone shall revere and respect you."

Yang Guo was touched and finally said something he had wanted to say for the past 20 years: "Uncle Guo, my accomplishments today are all due to your guidance."

The two heroes said no more and drank the wine, thinking there was nothing more they could desire.

They entered the city together and the citizens welcomed them with thunderous applause. Yang Guo thought, "More than twenty years ago, Guo Jing took my hand and brought me to Zhongnan Shan (Mount Zhongnan) and sent me to the Chongyang Palace to learn martial arts. He was completely sincere and honest towards me, yet I rebelled against my teacher and created a lot of trouble! If I hadn't corrected myself, how would I be what I am today?" He was extremely satisfied with himself.

The city was in a joyous mood even though many had lost their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons; but because of them their victory was complete.

Night fell and a large banquet was thrown for the heroes. Lu Wenhuan wanted Yang Guo to be the Guest-of-Honour but he refused flatly. Everyone pushed each other for a long time and they finally persuaded Yideng to be the Guest-of-Honour. Seated next to him was Zhou Botong, followed by Huang Yaoshi, Guo Jing, Huang Rong, Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu and Yelu Qi. Lu Wenhuan thought, "Island Master Huang is Hero Guo's father-in-law but that old monk Yideng's appearance is not remarkable while that old man Zhou is crazy and silly, how can either of them be the Guest-of-Honour?" However everyone was overjoyed and ignored him.

All the generals and officials took turns offering toasts to Guo Jing and Yang Guo and praised them as heroes of the highest order.

Guo Jing then thought of his master's kindness and said, "If not for Quanzhen's Priest Qiu's righteousness and my seven masters who went to Mongolia to teach me martial arts, and not to forget Master Hong, how would I be so highly-skilled today? But as we indulge in wine today, all my masters with the exception of Master Ke are already dead." Everyone felt rather sad. Guo Jing continued, "Now we have won the day, I

would like to ascend Mount Hua (Hua Shan) tomorrow and visit my master's grave." Yang Guo said, "Uncle Guo, I was thinking of this too; why don't we all go together?" Yideng, Huang Yaoshi and Zhou Botong all missed their old friend and so they agreed.

The banquet lasted late into the night before ending.

End of Chapter 39.

Chapter 40 - The Summit of Hua Shan

Translated by Frans Soetomo, edited by IcyFox, addition from the first edition by Frans, additional translation corrections by Athena



With a clear voice Yang Guo said, "We are having a great time gathering in this beautiful evening. We shall chat over a cup of wine when we meet again. Let us part here." He waved his sleeve, held Xiao Longnu's hand and walked down the mountain together with the Divine Eagle.

Early the next morning Guo Jing and the others quietly left Xiangyang through the north gate for Mount Hua (Hua Shan). They avoided the troops and the people's festive farewell. They walked slowly since Zhou Botong, Lu Wushuang, the Wu Brothers and the Fisherman (Secret Fisherman from Si Shui 'si shui yu yin') still had not recovered from their injuries. They covered only about 10 li everyday.

By the time they arrived at Mount Hua, those who were injured had recovered. Yang Guo showed them Hong Qigong and Ouyang Feng's graves, which were side by side. Huang Rong had purchased chicken, vegetables and other supplies. She lit a fire and prepared the food just as Hong Qigong liked it, as a memorial to him. Immediately they performed the ritual ceremony.

Guo Jing did not want to show respect toward Ouyang Feng's grave. He still remembered how his five masters died by the Western Poison's hands. True, it had been decades ago, but he could not forget it. Yang Guo was different. Together with Xiao Longnu they knelt in front of Ouyang's grave. Zhou Botong only clasped his fists in front of the grave and said, "Old Poison, Old Poison! You committed countless crimes in your lifetime. And after you died, your grave is right next to the Old Beggar's. I'd say you are very lucky! Today everybody else is kneeling in front of the Old Beggar, except these two kids. If you knew this, you would probably regret your ruthlessness!"

Everybody was amused to hear the Old Urchin's (Lao Wan Tong) jabbering.

They were about to eat dinner after the ceremony when suddenly they heard distant sounds of weapons clashing and people cursing. Zhou Botong was always ready to have fun. He was the first to run toward the battle sound. The others followed behind.

After a couple of bends the path led them to a plateau. There they saw about thirty or forty people battling each other. Some were short, some were tall, some were old, some were young, and there were priests, monks, men and women. They did not pay any attention to the newcomers. Perhaps they thought these newcomers were tourists or pilgrims.

"Ladies and Gentlemen hold on a moment!" a big burly man shouted. "Fighting chaotically like this will not determine who will be the 'Number One Valiant Hero under Heaven'. Let us take turns fighting. Whoever wins last shall hold the title."

"That's right!" said a priest with long whiskers. "There were Sword Meets on Mount Hua in the past. Why don't we do the same? Let us see who will win." That proposition was unanimously accepted.

"All right, who will go first?" Several people stepped forward.

Botong and the others looked on. They did not know who these people were.

When the first Swords Meet on Mount Hua was held, Guo Jing was not even born yet. The Eastern Heretic, Western Poison, Southern Emperor, Northern Beggar and Central Divinity were fighting for the 'Nine Yin Manual'. In the end the Central Divinity won the title of 'Number One Valiant Hero under Heaven'.

The second Swords Meet on Mount Hua was held twenty years later. Wang Chongyang, the Central Divinity had passed away by then. Eastern Heretic, Western Poison and Northern Beggar, Zhou Botong, Qiu Qianren and Guo Jing all attended. This time there was no clear winner. Who would have guessed that after decades there would be a third Swords Meet on Mount Hua, with unknown people as contestants? Therefore, Huang Yaoshi and the others were bewildered. Could the saying be true: "The later waves of the Chongjiang River always push the previous ones? The newer generation is competent to gain victory over the older one." Could it be that they, Huang Yaoshi and the others, were like 'a frog at the bottom of the well' and were ignorant of 'heaven above a heaven', 'people above the others'?

They saw six people fight in three pairs. As soon as they fought, Huang Yaoshi and the others began laughing; even the composed Reverend Yideng smiled. We don't need to compare them with the experts; they were far inferior even to Guo Fu or Guo Xiang.

Hearing the laugh, the six people stopped the fight, leaped back and somebody barked, "You're a reckless bunch! Your masters are having a contest here, and you are laughing? Go away, we may show mercy to you!"

Yang Guo laughed and whistled loudly. His voice echoed throughout the valley. Those people were shocked, and they were frightened to death. They threw away their weapons, and then they scrambled away.

"Ladies and Gentlemen ... Please!" Yang Guo shouted.

The people looked up, screamed and ran away. Somebody shouted indistinctly, "Go! Go away quickly! That was the Eagle Hero!" A moment later the plateau was empty. Cheng Ying, Guo Fu and the others chuckled.

“There are useless people out there, but I couldn’t have dreamed they would dare hold a Swords Meet on Mount Hua,” Huang Yaoshi sighed.

“There were Five Experts,” said Zhou Botong. “With the death of Western Poison, Northern Beggar and the Central Divinity, who could take their places?”

Five Experts Zhou Botong referred to were: Eastern Heretic, Western Poison, Southern Emperor, Northern Beggar and Central Divinity. Among them only Eastern Heretic Huang Yaoshi and Southern Emperor Reverend Yideng were left.

Huang Rong chuckled, she said, “Reverend Yideng and my father have always improved their skills. Therefore, they were among the Five Experts then, they should be now. Frankly speaking, my husband has inherited Northern Beggar’s skills; he is one of the Experts. Guo’Er is young, but his martial arts are extraordinary. He is unmatched in his generation, plus he is Ouyang Feng’s adopted son. Therefore, he deserves to be one of the Experts so he inherits Western Poison’s title.”

Hearing her Zhou Botong shook his head. “No, no it’s not right!” he said.

“Why not?” Huang Rong asked.

“Because Western Poison was venomous, while this kid Yang Guo is not! We dare not call him ‘Western Poison’?”

“Well, Brother Jing is not a beggar!” Huang Rong laughed, “While Reverend Yideng is not an emperor anymore. I think we’d better modify their titles a little bit. Father is the Eastern Heretic. It is a trademark; no modification is necessary. Reverend Yideng has become a monk; let us call him the Southern Monk. Now, about Guo’Er, I’d like to propose a title, ‘Passionate Hero’. How’s that sound?”

Huang Yaoshi was the first to say: The “Eastern Heretic” and “Western Passionate Hero, the old and young. Yes! This is a good title.”

“Pardon me,” said Yang Guo, “I am too young, I do not dare to be compared with the Seniors ...”

“Ha-ha... Little Brother!” said Huang Yaoshi. “You are wrong! You are called ‘Passionate Hero, why can’t we act it out for a moment? Besides, your name, your skills, don’t they exceed those of the Old Urchin?”

Huang Yaoshi understood Huang Rong’s intention. She did not mention the Old Urchin’s name to provoke him. Yang Guo also understood the father and daughter’s intention. He exchanged glances with Xiao Longnu; they both laughed. He thought, “These words ‘Passionate Hero’ is so appropriate ...”

“Southern Monk and Western Passionate Hero have been settled. How about the Northern Beggar?” asked Botong.

“I propose the word ‘Hero’, hence the Northern Hero,” said Zhu Ziliu. “The valiant people of this era call Brother Guo Jing as Great Hero Guo [Guo Da Xia]. He did a great service for his country. He has defended Xiangyang for decades; he protects the people and secured the peace. His valor is superior to Zhu Qi or Guo Gai of yesteryear. I believe it is very appropriate to call him the ‘Northern Hero’.”

“Agreed!” Reverend Yideng, Wu Santong and the others voiced their support.

“Eastern Heretic and Western Passionate Hero, Southern Monk and Northern Hero, we have four experts,” said Huang Yaoshi, “What about the Central? Who deserves to hold the title?” He cast a glance at Botong, but he continued, “Madam Yang is the only heir of the Ancient Tomb Sect [Gu Mu Bai]. I reckon it is appropriate for her to hold the title! When she

was still alive, Heroine Lin Chaoying roamed Jianghu; even Wang Chongyang held her in the highest regard. Who does not know the “Jade Maiden Swordplay” from the Ancient Tomb Sect? If Heroine Lin Chaoying attended the Swords Meet at Mount Hua, not only the titles of the ‘Five Experts’ would have changed, but the title ‘Number One Valiant Person under the Heaven’ would be hers. Yang Guo’s skill was acquired from his wife. If the disciple is one of the experts, can we question the master? Therefore, Madam Yang deserves to hold the Central position in place of the Central Divinity!”

Xiao Longnu laughed. “I really don’t deserve it,” she said.

“If not, Huang Rong should be one of the experts,” Huang Yaoshi continued. “She is still inferior in terms of martial arts skill, but she is intelligent and smart. Wasn’t there a saying: ‘brain over brawn’?”

“Good, good!” Botong clapped his hands. “What is Eastern Heretic? What is Great Hero Guo? I am not happy with all those names. This little girl Huang Rong is different. She is so smart. I, the Old Urchin, got a headache whenever I dealt with her. My limbs are weak, I cannot move! She should become one of the Five Experts; nobody deserves it more!”

Hearing him, everybody was amazed and impressed. They knew Zhou Botong liked to fool around but he had a big heart. Others deliberately did not mention his name to provoke him. Who knew he was really naïve? He did not have any intentions to boss anybody about; he did not desire fame.

“Old Urchin, you are great!” said Huang Yaoshi. “For me fame is nothing. For Reverend Yideng, it is emptiness. You are not like that. Your heart is free. You are superior to us all. Because we have already had Eastern Heretic and Western Passionate

Hero, Southern Monk and Northern Hero, you should hold the Central position, you are the Central Urchin!"

Huang Yaoshi's speech was applauded by loud cheering and clapping. Everybody was happy; the Five Experts had been decided. They scattered around Mount Hua sightseeing.

Yang Guo pointed to the Jade Maiden Peak. "Our sword technique is called "Jade Maiden Swordplay". We cannot miss a visit to the peak," he said to Xiao Longnu.

"That's true," answered his wife. Holding hands they climbed to the peak.

On the peak there was a small temple with a statue of a horse next to it. It was the Jade Maiden Temple. Inside the temple was a big rock - its center was hollow. It contained clear water. Yang Guo had climbed Mount Hua before, and Hong Qigong had explained to him the points of interest on the mountain. He pointed to the rock and told Xiao Longnu, "This is the water basin of the Jade Maiden. This clear water never dries up." Xiao Longnu nodded. "Let us go to the hall to pay our respect to the Jade Maiden," she said.

Yang Guo complied. They went to the hall. There was a statue of a very beautiful woman. She looked so dignified. What amazed them was that the face of the statue bore a close resemblance to the picture of Lin Chaoying inside the Ancient Tomb.

"Could it be that the Jade Maiden is actually our Grand Martial Master?" asked the wife.

"Very possible," answered Yang Guo. "Grand Martial Master Lin liked to wander around. She helped many people. It could be that some people remembered her kindness and built this temple."

“That’s right. If it was a Jade Maiden temple, how could there be a horse statue here? Looks like Grand Martial Master roamed around riding a horse.”

The two of them then knelt in front of the altar. They prayed silently for protection and happiness as husband and wife.

They heard footsteps coming near from outside. They turned their heads and saw Guo Xiang.

“Little Sister, let us look around together!” Yang Guo was delighted. “Oh yes!” answered Guo Xiang.

Xiao Longnu held her hand and together they left the hall. They followed a stone corridor and climbed to a big cave. Guo Xiang looked inside; she felt cold breeze coming from the cave and she shivered. The cave was like a deep well; one could not see its bottom. It was different from the gorge at the Passionless Valley, which was covered by heavy fog so that nobody could see the bottom. This cave was almost vertical as far as the eye could see and made people looking down feel very nervous.

“Be careful,” Xiao Longnu warned her, holding her hand.

“I heard the water from this cave flows to the Yellow River [Huang He],” said Yang Guo. “It is one of the eight Water Palaces in China. During the Tang Dynasty there was a drought in northern China. The Emperor Tang Xuan Zong wrote a letter to Heaven, asking for rain. He threw the letter down into this cave.”

“From here flowing to the Yellow River, how peculiar!” said Guo Xiang.

“Well, it was a legend!” Yang Guo chuckled. “Nobody has ever gone down into this cave. Who could prove it?”

“When the Emperor Tang Zong threw his jade board letter, did Concubine Yang stand next to him?” asked Guo Xiang. “Did it really rain?”

Yang Guo laughed. “How can I answer your question?” he said, “Whether it rained or not, that was the Heaven’s decision. Even an emperor could not force its will ...”

Guo Xiang looked at the cave, she softly said, “That’s true, even an emperor could not have everything his heart desires ...”

Yang Guo was amazed to hear her say that. “This girl is still young, but she is mature,” he thought. “I must try to make her happy.” He was going to open his mouth when suddenly Xiao Longnu said, “Ah, who’s that coming our way?” She pointed her finger.

Yang Guo turned around. Below the steps there were two people stealthily creeping nearer. Xiao Longnu’s eyes were really sharp; she could see them in the dim light of dusk.

“Their skills are not bad,” said Yang Guo softly, “Judging from their movements, they must have some ulterior motive. Let’s hide and see what’s going on.”

Xiao Longnu and Guo Xiang complied. They hid behind a big rock next to a big tree. Not too long after they could hear footsteps approaching. It was evening and the moon had risen.

Guo Xiang stood next to Xiao Longnu. She did not care about those two men, she looked at Yang Guo and thought in her heart, “If only I could be like this forever. Being with Big Brother and Sister Long, I would desire nothing else ...” She wanted the time to stand still ...

Xiao Longnu inadvertently looked toward her direction and she saw tears welling up in her eyes; she was puzzled. She

thought, "This is strange, what is she thinking about? I'll talk with my husband later and see what we can do to make her happy."

Meanwhile those two men had reached the peak, where they hid themselves behind a big rock. After some time one of them said, "Brother Xiaoxiang, Mount Hua has so many thick forests where we can hide. I think even though that bald donkey [derogatory term for Buddhist monks] is good, he won't be able to find us here. Let's just stay here for a few days, and then we can go farther west."

Yang Guo could not see the speaker, but he guessed it was Yin Kexi and his companion must be Xiaoxiang Zi. Yang Guo thought, "Among the martial arts experts in the Mongolian camp, Jinlun Fawang and Nimoxing have died. Da'erba and Ma Guangzuo were not that bad. Only Yin Kexi and Xiaoxiang Zi were left. I have shown them mercy, but looks like they didn't repent. I wonder what they are up to?"

"Don't be happy yet, Brother Yin," said Xiaoxiang Zi, his voice eerie. "If the baldheaded donkey can not find us, he might guard the mountain's entrance. If we are not careful, he will certainly find us ..."

"Brother Xiaoxiang is right. What is your thought?"

"There are so many temples scattered around this mountain. I think we'd better find the most remote one. No matter if the priests are Taoists or Buddhists, we kill them, we take over their temple and then we stay there. That bald donkey will not wait for us forever. Maybe months or years, but in the end he'll have to leave."

"Great idea Brother Xiaoxiang!" said Yin Kexi, his voice loud from excitement.

"Hush!" Xiaoxiang Zi reminded him.

“Uh, I was too excited,” said Yin Kexi apologetically. Then the two of them talked in low voice that Yang Guo wasn’t able to hear.

“I wonder who the monk is,” Yang Guo thought. “These two are experts, yet they are afraid of him. Actually, other than Island Master Huang, Reverend Yideng, Uncle Guo and their peers, these two are already unmatched. Why would someone want to capture them? No, I can’t let them go. Didn’t they say they are going to kill people and take over their temple?”

At that time Guo Fu was calling from a distance, “Brother Yang, Sister-in-law! Sister Xiang! Come and have dinner!” She repeated her calls a couple more times.

Yang Guo turned to his wife and Guo Xiang, signaling them not to make any noise.

After a while Guo Fu was gone. But from the mountain they heard a shout, “Book thief! Show yourself!” That voice was loud and powerful. It was a sign of strong internal energy. Yang Guo was astonished, the voice was not inferior to his. He wondered, “How come there is an expert I do not know?”

By moving his body a little bit, Yang Guo was able to see the source of the voice. He saw a grey shadow running lightning fast toward the hill where they were. Very soon he could see that the shadow was actually two people: a grey-robed monk holding a youngster’s hand.

Yin Kexi and Xiaoxiang Zi had already hidden themselves amongst the tall grasses. They did not dare to breathe.

Yang Guo kept staring, he thought, “In terms of lightness kungfu, he is not superior to Long’er or me, but he is able to carry someone on this difficult path. His strength is

comparable to Reverend Yideng and Uncle Guo. How come I've never heard of him?"

Very soon the monk arrived at the top. His eyes gazed around him, but he didn't see Yin Kexi or Xiaoxiang Zi. A moment later he dragged the youngster west.

"Hey, Reverend!" Guo Xiang suddenly shouted, she could not contain herself. "Reverend, those two people are here!" She was just shutting her mouth when three projectiles flew her way! They were two 'flying awls' and a 'nail of death'.

Yang Guo's eyes were sharp and he was quick. He waved his sleeve and caught all three projectiles.

Guo Xiang's internal energy was not too strong; the monk could not hear her. They moved further away. "Big Brother, please go after them!" she said.

Yang Guo did not answer, but he spoke softly, like he was reciting a poem, "If it is meant to be, a distance of a thousand li does not hinder; if it isn't meant to be, standing face to face yet cannot meet."

His voice reached far. The monk stopped abruptly, turned his head and said, "Thank you Expert for showing the way!"

Yang Guo responded with similar voice, "Searching until iron shoes wear out yet do not meet; once you see it, it is right in front of your eyes."

The monk was delighted, pulling along the youngster they came back.

Xiaoxiang Zi and Yin Kexi were very shocked to hear Yang Guo's voice. They looked at each other and leaped toward the east, running away.

Yang Guo saw them starting to move while the monk was still a distance away. The monk would certainly miss these two criminals no matter how fast he could run. He quickly flicked one of Xiaoxiang Zi's awls toward them. He didn't want to take their lives; hence the awl was flying in front of them, to block their way.

The two were shocked; their faces were hot just from the wind of the projectile. They turned around and ran to the north. Yang Guo flicked again, and another projectile flew in front of them, forcing them to turn around once more. By that time the monk had arrived.

Seeing their escape route was blocked, both Yin Kexi and Xiaoxiang Zi unsheathed their weapons. They stood shoulder to shoulder. One was wielding a golden dragon whip, the other a wolf-fang staff. Yin Kexi's jeweled whip was destroyed by Yang Guo at Chongyang Palace; this new whip of his – although inlaid with gold, was inferior to the old one.

The monk looked around. He didn't see the man who gave him directions. Ignoring those two, he clasped his fists to the air and said, "Little Monk Jueyuan from the Shaolin Temple thanks the Benevolent Sir!"

Yang Guo did not answer immediately. He looked intently at the monk. The monk stood straight, his countenance fresh and ruddy. If it wasn't for the fact that he was baldheaded and wearing a monk's robe, he would have looked like a scholar. Compared to him, Huang Yaoshi looked more arrogant and wild, like a scholarly hermit. Zhu Ziliu had a more regal and sophisticated look, like a prime minister. He was about fifty years of age; therefore, Yang Guo did not dare to be disrespectful. He quickly came out and returned the greeting, "Junior Yang Guo pays his respects." Yang Guo thought in his heart, "The Abbot of the Shaolin Temple, the Head of the Damo Hall, I know them all. Their level is not as

high as his, how come I've never heard them mentioning his name?"

The monk again paid his respects. He was so polite and scholarly. "It's an honor for little Monk to make the acquaintance of Benevolent Master Yang!" he said, and then he bade the youngster, "Quickly pay your respects to Benevolent Master Yang!"

The youngster complied; he knelt in front of Yang Guo. Quickly Yang Guo stood him up. In the meantime Xiao Longnu and Guo Xiang had come out. Jueyuan also paid them his respects, which they reciprocated.

Yin Kexi and Xiaoxiang Zi were still standing alert, ready to fight, but they were thinking about escaping too. They knew they were no match for these people. Jueyuan alone had frightened them.

Yang Guo said, "About six years ago I was fortunate to receive an invitation from the Shaolin's Abbot Tianming. I visited Mount Shao Shi and made acquaintance with the Venerable Wuxiang from the Damo Hall and a number of other monks. I gained a lot of knowledge because of that. Wuse from the Luo Han Hall befriended me as well. It seems like the monk was not in the temple at the time, and I was not fortunate enough to make your acquaintance."

By that time the name Eagle Hero was very well known, yet Jueyuan seemed oblivious of him. He said, "Oh, it seems like Benevolent Sir knows Martial Uncle Tianming and both Martial Brothers Wuxiang and Wuse and the others. Little Monk abides in the library and has never left the temple even for a single step. My position is very low; I do not dare to meet any honorable guests, including you, Benefactor Sir ..."

Yang Guo was amazed and he thought, "It is true that in this wide world there are many experts. Monk Jueyuan's skill is

very high, yet he hides himself away. It is very possible the people of Shaolin are not aware of his skill; if so, my good friend Wuse would have mentioned him ...”

Meanwhile Huang Yaoshi and the others had arrived; they heard Yang Guo and Jueyuan’s shouts earlier and believed something must’ve happened on the peak. Yang Guo immediately introduced everybody to Jueyuan. Strangely, even though Huang Yaoshi, Reverend Yideng, Zhou Botong, Guo Jing and Huang Rong were very well known, he didn’t seem to recognize their names. He simply paid his respects and told the youngster to do the same. Huang Yaoshi and the others automatically noticed the Reverend’s grandeur from the way he moved and talked and couldn’t help but feel deep respect toward him.

Only after all these formalities did Jueyuan turn to Yin Kexi and Xiaoxiang Zi. He clasped his fists in respect and said, “Little Monk in is charge of the library. I would be responsible for and even punished if even a sheet of paper is lost. Therefore, I respectfully request you two gentlemen to return the books you borrowed. I will be very grateful to you two.”

Hearing this Yang Guo realized that Yin Kexi and Xiaoxiang Zi had stolen books from the Shaolin Monastery’s library. Only he did not know what kind of book would make Jueyuan pursue the thieves this far. Also, he was amazed that Jueyuan was very courteous toward the thieves.

Laughing, Yin Kexi said, “Venerable Monk, you are wrong! We are so grateful that you helped us while we were so unfortunate. How could we repay your kindness by borrowing books from you? We regret that you have made a long journey to find us here. Besides, we are not disciples of Buddhism, why would we borrow some scriptures?”

Yin Kexi was a merchant specializing in jewels; he was very eloquent, hence his words were very reasonable. But Yang

Guo knew he must be lying. Both he and Xiaoxiang Zi were criminals. Also, the books they stole must not be any ordinary books. The books must be either a palm techniques or swords play manual. Yang Guo thought talking is a waste of time; it would be best to immobilize them, and then search their bodies. But Jueyuan was very courteous. He turned to Huang Yaoshi and the others and said, "Little Monk is going to lay the case in front of you, please adjudicate for us."

Guo Xiang was straightforward and impatient, she loudly said, "Elder Monk, these two were hiding here and planning to kill people and take over their temple. They intend to hide themselves from you. Why would they be so afraid if they were innocent?"

"Mercy, mercy," Jueyuan said. "Benefactor Sirs, you two must repent if indeed you were having that thought."

Huang Yaoshi and the rest were amused. This Monk was very naïve. Why would he talk like that to criminals? On the other hand, Yin Kexi was relieved since Jueyuan obviously did not want to resort to violence; he still had hopes of escaping.

Jueyuan continued, "That day little Monk was inspecting the books in the library. I heard a commotion on the hill behind the temple. I could hear people fighting and some were crying for help. Therefore, I went out to see. There I saw these two gentlemen lying on the ground, being beaten by four Mongolian officers; they were dying. I couldn't stay silent. I asked those four officers to let them go, and then I took them to my room. Now Benevolent Sirs, did I say anything untrue?"

"No, it was indeed the truth," answered Yin Kexi. "We are very grateful to the Reverend."

"Hmm!" Yang Guo intervened, "With your skills, forty or even four hundred Mongolian officers would not be able to harm

you, let alone only four! You were deceiving Reverend Jueyuan!”

Jueyuan ignored Yang Guo and continued, “After a day of recuperation they said that they were bored and wanted to borrow something to read. This little Monk thinks that proselytizing is an honorable thing. These two gentlemen showed interest in Buddhism; therefore, little Monk loaned them several books. When I was meditating one evening, these two gentlemen took away four volumes of the Nijia Jing scripture being read by my disciple Junbao. They took the books without permission. That was an improper thing to do. Therefore, little Monk would respectfully ask the Benevolent Sirs to return the books.”

Listening to the monk, Reverend Yideng and Zhu Ziliu were amazed, and then they speculated. Yideng was a monk and he had read all kind of books. Zhu Ziliu was a scholar and because of his association with his master, he was also familiar with different kinds of scriptures. They thought, “These two stole some books from the Shaolin Monastery. I thought they must be some kind of martial arts manual; who knew they only stole the Nijia Jing. The books were brought by Master Damo to the east. The content was the fundamental teachings of Buddha, which he preached in Sri Lanka. There is no relation to martial arts whatsoever. Why would these two steal them? These books have been around for a while; there are no secrets within them. Why would Jueyuan waste his time chasing these two? I think there is more to it than what meets the eye ...”

Jueyuan continued, “These four volumes of Nijia Jing were brought by Master Damo from the west. They were written in Sanskrit. I am sure Benevolent Sirs are not able to read them, but for us, they were our treasures.”

Only then did the others understand that Jueyuan was talking about the original Sutra, the one Bodhidharma wrote in India. No wonder the books were very important.

Yin Kexi laughed, he said, "That gave us a stronger reason not to borrow the books. We do not read Sanskrit. Even if we wanted to sell the books, just how much would we gain? Other than devout Buddhists and monks, nobody wants them anyway!"

Everybody was dissatisfied listening to this man's sharp tongue, they started to get angry. Jueyuan, on the other hand, was very calm and patient. He continued, "The Nijia Jing had four different Chinese translations, but only three are left. The first one was translated by Guna-bhadra during the Liu family Song dynasty; it was named the Nijia Jing ["Guna-bhadra Lankavatara sutra]." It consisted of four volumes, also known as the Four Volumes of Lankavatara Sutra. It was similar to the Damo [Bodhidharma] taught version of the scripture and they could be compared with each other. The second one was translated by Bodhiruci during the Wei dynasty, named "Enlightened Lankavatara Sutra", it consisted of ten volumes. It was later also known as the Ten Volumes of Lankavatara Sutra. The third one was translated by Siksaananda during the Tang dynasty, named the "Mahayana Lankavatara Sutra", it consisted of seven volumes, it was later also known as the Seven Nijia Jing [Seven Volumes of Lankavatara Sutra], this was also the last translation. The final translation is also the clearest and most easily understood version, it is widely spread. I have a copy of it with me now. I am very happy to see that both benefactors are interested in Buddhism; I would be pleased to give you these scriptures. If you're also interested in the other translations of the Nijia Jing [Lankavatara Sutra], it is not impossible to obtain copies for you."

Jueyuan groped his pocket and brought out a copy of the Seven Nijia Jing. He gave them to his disciple, who in turn presented them to Yin Kexi and Xiaoxiang Zi.

“Jueyuan is so naïve yet so exceptional. No wonder these two scoundrels were able to steal the books under his care,” Yang Guo thought.

Suddenly the youngster opened his mouth, “Shifu, these two criminals did not have good intentions, they only want the treasured book! I don’t believe they have any interest in our religion.”

Everybody was surprised hearing this youngster’s voice. He was only a boy, yet his voice was loud and clear like a bell. They looked at him and saw his extraordinary features. He had a narrow forehead, slim neck, broad chest, round eyes, and big ears. His skin was ruddy. He looked about twelve or thirteen years of age, but acted like an adult.

“Little Brother, what is your great surname and given name?” asked Yang Guo.

“The little Monk’s disciple is surnamed Zhang and given name Junbao,” Jueyuan answered on his disciple’s behalf. “He has helped me in the library since he was really young, sweeping the floor and watering the plants. He calls me Master, but he has not shaved his head, since he is a layman disciple.”

Yang Guo was impressed, he praised, “An excellent Master will produce an excellent disciple. The Venerable Monk’s disciple is an extraordinary one.”

“It’s not ‘excellent Master’, it’s just that this boy has a flawless talent,” said Jueyuan humbly. “It’s a pity little Monk does not know anything. I am afraid I will not do him any good. Junbao, you are very fortunate to meet such experts

today. You have to ask for advice. Remember the saying that goes like 'listening to a master's words is more precious than reading books for ten years'."

"That's right," answered Junbao, while he thought in his heart, "Right now the most important thing is getting the books back. I can ask advice later ..." He kept this thought to himself, and did not say anything.

Zhou Botong could not contain himself any longer after listening to Jueyuan's gentle words.

"Hey Yin Kexi and Xiaoxiang Zi!" he said, scolding those two. "You can deceive Elder Monk, but you cannot deceive me, the Old Urchin! Do you know who the Five Experts of today are?"

"I do not know," answered Yin Kexi. "Please enlighten me."

"Good!" said Botong proudly. "Stand straight and listen! They are the Eastern Heretic, Western Passionate, Southern Monk, Northern Hero and Central Urchin! The first and foremost is the Central Urchin! I say you stole those books, and therefore, you are the thieves! If you were not the thieves, then those books must be in your possession somehow! You have to present those books to this monk! If you hesitate, watch out, I am going to cut off one of your ears!"

Having said that, the Old Urchin moved forward, his arms open wide. He wanted to carry out his threat.

Xiaoxiang Zi and Yin Kexi frowned. They knew the Old Urchin's skill; they also knew he would do what he said he would. While they are contemplating what to do, Jueyuan opened his mouth again, "Benevolent Master Zhou, you are wrong! There are rules for everything. On the matter of the Nijia Jing scriptures, if they said they borrowed them, then

they borrowed them. If not, then they didn't borrow them. But if they did borrow and did not admit it, then we can say they broke the rules."

Botong heartily laughed. "You see?" he said, "Elder Monk is remarkable! I'm helping him to get his books back, yet he helps them to speak! What kind of rule is that? Elder Monk, I want to say something! I want to make sure they stole the books. If they didn't, I'll take them back to Mount Shaoshi for them to steal the books. Either they did or did not steal, but they still are the thieves!"

Botong spoke unreasonably, but Jueyuan nodded his head. "Benevolent Master Zhou, now you are talking!" he said. "Only let us not use the word 'steal', let's just say that they 'took without permission'. These two gentlemen had the desire to borrow; yet they did not have the permission. They have taken the books without permission."

Listening to this discussion, everybody smiled in amusement. They talked without logic. Yang Guo could not contain his anger. He stood up in front of Zhou Botong, facing Yin Kexi and Xiaoxiang Zi. "You have assisted a tyrant committing atrocities!" he said, "You have betrayed our country by being allies with the Mongolians! You deserve death for this crime! We have Reverend Yideng and Venerable Jueyuan here. These two monks won't let me beat you to death. Therefore, I am going to give you two choices. First, you return the books you stole and never set foot on the central plains again. Second, each of you will receive one blow from me. Whether you live or you die, let your fate decide!"

The two looked at each other. They did not dare to give an answer. They knew the fierceness of this man surnamed Yang. They realized they would not be able to take even one of his blows. Yin Kexi thought, "Only this one day...if I can survive this day, I can train myself and take revenge later on ...

Seems to me that amongst this bunch the monk is the easiest one to talk to. I'd better try him." He said, "Great Hero Yang [Yang Da Xia], let's sort out the business between you and I later. In terms of martial arts skills, you are way superior to me; I do not dare to offend you. But about the books, let us talk to Monk Jueyuan. You don't have any business in it; do you, Yang Da Xia?"

Before Yang Guo could answer, Jueyuan had already nodded his head repeatedly. "That's true!" he said, "This Benevolent Sir had spoken reasonably."

Yang Guo could only shake his head. He grinned and turned to Zhang Junbao. He saw the youngster's eyes were shining; it looked like he wanted to attack. Therefore, Yang Guo winked at him, encouraging him to go. Yang Guo then positioned himself behind the boy.

Zhang Junbao understood his signal; he moved toward Yin Kexi and harshly said, "Benevolent Mister Yin, I was reading the book that day. You sneaked up on me, sealed my accupoints and disabled me; then you stole the four-volume Nijia Jing scripture. Is that true?"

Yin Kexi shook his head. "If I wanted to borrow the book, I would ask you," he denied, "I believed little Master would not deny me. Why would I seal your accupoints?"

Jueyuan nodded. "Yes, yes, that's true," he said.

"Both of you said you did not borrow the book, do you mind if I search your body?" Junbao asked.

"Body search is not proper," said Jueyuan, "But this business is complicated. Benevolent Sirs, do you have a better idea on how you can remove my suspicions?"

Yin Kexi was about to deny further when Yang Guo suddenly said, "Venerable Monk Jueyuan, I believe these two would not

have any interest in the teachings of Buddha! Monk Jueyuan, is there anything special in those books?"

Jueyuan was silent for a while, he was thinking hard. But then he answered with a deep voice, "As a monk I cannot tell lies. Since Benevolent Master Yang has asked, little Monk has to give you the truth. Inside the Nijia Jing scripture there is another book written by Master Damo himself. That book is the 'Nine Yang Manual' [Jiu Yang Zhen Jing]."

Everybody was stunned. In the past, the 'Nine Yin Manual' [Jiu Yin Zhen Jing] had caused people to fight to the death; blood had been shed. It was at the Mount Hua Sword Meet that Wang Zhongyang won the right to that book. But Wang Zhongyang was a man of honor; he was not greedy. He won the book but did not take advantage of its contents at that time. He later read the book out of curiosity. He divided it into two parts. He wanted to avoid further bloodshed due to people fighting over it. But still, the book created more disasters. For instance, Huang Yaoshi had to expel his disciples, Zhou Botong was kept captive on the Peach Blossom Island, Ouyang Feng went crazy, and, indirectly, Emperor Duan became a monk.

Actually, besides the 'Nine Yin Manual' Master Damo had written another book, which was the 'Nine Yang Manual'. This book had the same value as the 'Nine Yin Manual'; as a matter of fact, these two books complement each other. Only the name of the 'Nine Yang Manual' was not as widely known as the 'Nine Yin Manual'. It was the first time that everybody heard this book mentioned. No wonder Huang Yaoshi and the others were astonished and amazed.

Jueyuan ignored these astonished people and continued his explanation, "Little Monk is in charge of the library. It is my duty to inspect every single book of the library's collection. The 'Nine Yang Manual' is different from any other book. It

contains lessons to make our body healthy and strong, like 'Replacing Muscles Cleaning the Marrow'. I have mastered the lessons for many-many years, and true enough, I have never been sick. I have taught Junbao the rudimentary lessons from the 'Nine Yang Manual' for the last several years. Even though it was Master Damo's original work, it was not as valuable as the Nijia Jing, which contains great teachings. Benevolent Sirs do not read Sanskrit; the book is useless to you. You'd better return it to me."

Yang Guo was puzzled. He didn't understand what the Monk was saying. He thought, "Lessons on health? This is very peculiar. The Monk is also very remarkable. If I didn't know better, I would say the Monk is just acting. I wonder why Venerable Wuxiang and Wuse - who literally lived together with this Monk for decades, are not aware there is an expert of this caliber in their midst." Reverend Yideng on the other hand, recognized that Jueyuan has reached perfection, that was the reason he could act so naïvely.

Yin Kexi patted his body. "I don't have anything on me, how could I have the book?" he said loudly. "I don't either!" Xiaoxiang Zi said, shaking his clothes.

"Let me see!" Junbao suddenly shouted. His body flew toward Yin Kexi. He grabbed his chest.

Yin Kexi turned his left arm around, eluding the attack. His right arm pushed Junbao's shoulder. It looked like his movement was light, but it resulted in Junbao's body collapsing to the ground.

"Aha! That was incorrect, Junbao!" cried Jueyuan, "You have to be patient. Your strength concentrated like a mountain. You will see whether he can push you down or not ..."

Zhang Junbao leaped up. "That's right, Shifu!" he said. Then he leaped toward Yin Kexi again.

Everybody else had lost their patience, but they were delighted hearing Jueyuan's advice. They thought, "This gentle monk could encourage his disciple to fight after all ..."

Yin Kexi repeated his former moves; he eluded the attack and then pushed out. But this time Junbao only staggered and did not collapse to the ground like before. Yin Kexi was astonished, he was afraid of Zhou Botong, Guo Jing and Yang Guo and their peers; who would have thought that he was not even able to overcome the boy? He was anxious and pushed harder.

Zhang Junbao held his ground. But Yin Kexi's force abruptly disappeared and he fell down, face to the ground. Yin Kexi quickly straightened up and laughed, "Little Master, you shouldn't have kneeled to me." Of course he was mocking him.

Junbao's face flushed. He came to his master and said, "I failed, Shifu."

Jueyuan scratched his head. "He purposely made an 'emptiness'," he said. "He uses nothingness to defeat something. When you are exerting your energy, you must use it freely, don't mind your opponent's force's direction. You see that mountain peak over there?" He pointed to a mountain peak to the west. "It has stood strong from thousands of years ago until today. Storms came from the west, rains from the east, it didn't budge, but it did not purposely challenge the force of the nature either."

Junbao was smart, he understood easily. He nodded. "Very well Shifu. I understand," he said. "Let me try again." After having said that, he slowly walked toward Yin Kexi.

Yang Guo kept his gaze on the youngster. He saw him leap forward before, and now he was walking slowly. Yang Guo knew it must be the principle taken from the 'Nine Yang

Manual'. So the book not only taught how to keep one's body healthy, but also how to defeat an opponent.

When he was about four feet away from Yin Kexi, Junbao stretched out his arms to hold Yin's hand. Yin Kexi laughed. He put forth his left arm as bait, and his right hand punched the boy's chest. He had no intention to hurt him, so his punch was not frontal; it was slanted toward the boy's side. He only wanted the boy to experience a little bit of pain and to learn a lesson.

Zhang Junbao did not elude the attack. In a flash his chest was hit. "Shifu, I can hold it!" he said.

Yin Kexi was shocked. His fist hit its target, yet he felt the boy's body imparting an opposing force, which made his punch bounce back. Fortunately he was skilled. He quickly neutralized the force. His left hand moved toward the boy's shoulder. He wanted to grab and lift and toss the boy away. When he lifted, the boy did not budge. He was shocked and amazed, and finally anxious. Several times he changed his tactics. Junbao only swayed back and forth, left and right, but he could not make him fall down. He kept throwing punches, and out of embarrassment said, "Little Master, I am not fighting with you! A valiant man would use diplomacy, not brute force. You go away, let us talk as decent people do."

Each one of Yin Kexi's punches was stronger than the previous one, but Junbao did not budge. His body kept imparting opposing forces. The harder he was hit, the stronger the opposing force was. After a while Junbao cried, "Ah, Shifu, he hit me hard! I feel pain! Shifu, help me!"

Yin Kexi said, "I won't hit you if you don't hit me first. Elder Master, if you want to hit me just do so. If you show mercy to me, I won't dare to retaliate."

Jueyuan shook his head. "What Benevolent Master Yin said was true!" he said, "You don't need to use brute force ... No, I can't help you. You have to overcome your own problem. You have to know which one is empty which one is not. Everything is either empty or full. Remember what I said, your body must be like a drum, with nothing inside. Don't put in too much, don't put in too little, and don't let it break."

Junbao understood. He had been with Jueyuan since he was only six or seven years old, and his master had bestowed the 'Nine Yang Manual' on him. He readied himself. Now he only felt a little bit of pain, not as severe as before.

With a man of his skill, Yin Kexi could hurt the boy severely. But there were Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu, Zhou Botong, Guo Jing and the others standing nearby. He was afraid of them, thus he did not dare to kill or harm the boy. He could not knock the boy down, but the boy could not touch him either; so the two kept fighting.

Yang Guo and the others were amused. Xiaoxiang Zi frowned, he was perplexed and anxious. Guo Xiang also had lost her patience. "Little Brother, hit him!" she urged, "Why do you let him beat you without you retaliating?"

"No! Don't!" Jueyuan cried, "Don't be anxious, and don't be angry! Don't hit, don't curse!"

"You hit him!" Guo Xiang encouraged, "If you can't, I'll help you!"

"Thank you, Miss!" said Junbao. He hit Yin Kexi's chest.

"What a sin! What a sin!" cried Jueyuan shaking his head, "Your mind is no longer clear like a bright mirror stopping the water flow ..."

Junbao fought as one who had never learned martial arts before, he just threw punches randomly; how could he injure

the opponent? Yin Kexi heartily laughed, but actually he was distressed. He had been well known in the Jianghu world for dozens of years; nobody had the audacity to mock him. Who would have thought that he had to suffer humiliation by fighting with a young boy? The worse part was: he was not able to do anything ... Even if Junbao's punches were not hard, he eventually felt the pain.

Yin Kexi was anxious. His attacks were in vain. He wanted to kill the boy, but he was afraid of the others. He kept throwing punches, but the boy stood his ground. He was screaming with pain until Jueyuan repeatedly implored, "Benevolent Master Yin, please don't kill my disciple; he is a very smart boy. He is bothering you because of the lost books; the treasured scriptures of our Sect. If the Abbot finds out, we will be severely punished. Little Monk implores you ..." While to Junbao he said, "Junbao, remember your lessons. Use your brain, not your brawn. Follow the opponent's movements, be flexible. Put your mind where he hits you ..."

"That's right!" Junbao loudly answered. Afterward, he did not scream anymore. Where Yin Kexi's attack was, his mind was there. No more pain. Again Yin Kexi was puzzled. "Watch out, I will hit your head!" he threatened.

Junbao lifted his hand in anticipation, but he was tricked. Yin Kexi did not hit his head, but kicked with left leg so that the boy fell rolling to the ground. He kept rolling and came near Yang Guo.

"Benevolent Master Yin, why did you lie?" Jueyuan rebuked. "You said you were going to hit his head, you told him to watch out, but you kicked instead. You used trickery to deceive others."

Huang Yaoshi and the others were very amused. In battle, emptiness is full, fullness is empty. One must use any trick that is unpredictable to the opponent.

Junbao was displeased. He rubbed the kicked part of his body and said, "I won't stop until I search you!" He strode toward Yin Kexi.

Yang Guo stretched his arm to hold the boy. "Little Brother, wait a moment!" he said. Junbao was startled; he turned his head. He felt numbness from Yang Guo's grip.

Yang Guo whispered, "All you did was let him hit you without hitting him back. You can't do that. Let me teach you a move. And then you hit him and see what happens." He then flicked his empty right sleeve in front to Junbao's face while thrusting his left hand to the youngster's chest. About half a foot away he suddenly changed direction to the boy's waist. He whispered again, "Your Master was right, he said 'put your mind where the opponent hits'. It is the same thing with your punch. Put your mind where your punch goes. As your Master said, use your brain, not your brawn."

Junbao was delighted; he followed Yang Guo's direction. He moved toward Yin Kexi, lifted his right arm toward Yin Kexi's face while thrusting his left hand toward Yin's chest. Yin Kexi lifted his hand to parry. Junbao could see the opponent's movement; he suddenly moved his hand toward Yin's ribs.

Yin Kexi had experienced the youngster's punch before; it was not too hard. He also saw Yang Guo was giving the boy some pointers. He did not pay too much attention since he thought what harm could come from the kid's hundred or two hundred punches anyway? But he was wrong. When the punch hit his ribs he felt an excruciating pain so that his body bent over. He almost screamed. Of course he was surprised, but also livid. He saw Junbao was going to repeat his attack. He waved his right hand toward Yin's face and thrust his left hand toward Yin's chest. Yin Kexi was already familiar with this move. He parried the thrust. Junbao was

thrown toward, and hit, a rock so that his forehead was bleeding.

The youngster did not utter any words. He quickly wiped the blood away and walked toward Yang Guo. Kneeling in front of Yang Guo he said, "Benevolent Master Yang, please teach me another one."

Yang Guo nodded. He knew Yin Kexi was paying attention now, so he whispered, "This time I teach you three moves. In the first, your left and right hands are interchangeable. It will look like you will use your left, but in actuality it will be your right. When you thrust your right, actually it will be your left."

Junbao nodded. Yang Guo taught him the stance 'Repelling the Heart Pressing the Stomach' [tui xin zhi fu]. The boy memorized it well.

"And now the second move," Yang Guo continued. "This time left is left and right is right." He taught him the stance 'To Extend in All Directions, Four Pass Through, Eight Reached' [si tong ba da li]. Junbao went through it in his head twice and he would remember it forever.

"The third move is 'Who Killed the Deer' [lu si shui shou]. It involves front and rear exchange, it is more complex than the others, so you can't make mistake. You don't understand accupoints sealing technique, that's fine. I will mark his back. If you press that, you will be able to control him." While talking Yang Guo also moved his finger to give an example, he said, "Remember, this move relies on footwork. Understand it?"

"Yes," Junbao nodded and walked toward Yin Kexi.

Yin Kexi had watched Yang Guo carefully; he said in his heart, "These three stances are good. They are difficult to counter if

they came from Yang Guo himself, but he taught that kid in front of my eyes. Did he think Yin Kexi is as stupid as an ox or a wooden horse? Ah Yang Guo, you underestimate me too much!”

Because he was filled with anger, Yin Kexi did not think straight. As soon as Junbao came in front of him, he immediately attacked the boy’s shoulder. His punch was right on target.

Junbao remembered Yang Guo’s instructions, he let the attack come, he didn’t even dodge it, he only gritted his teeth. Yin Kexi hit using five parts of his strength; his objective was to frighten the kid. Junbao screamed in pain, his shoulder made a popping sound; but he ignored it and attacked with the first move.

Yin Kexi had watched Yang Guo’s instructions; he had thought of ways to fend off the attack, but he did not hear Yang Guo’s words. He thought he would punch the kid to the ground as he did before.

But Junbao’s attack was beyond his expectation: he parried the boy’s right hand punch with his left, but the attack was a fake one; while his right hand also grabbed in vain. Suddenly his stomach was hit very hard and he began to sweat profusely.

“Brother Yang that was a well executed “Repelling the Heart Pressing the Stomach”!” Zhou Botong praised while laughing heartily.

Yin Kexi was stunned, but Junbao had already attacked him with the second stance, “To Extend in All Directions”, which could be interpreted as the punch would come from all directions. He still felt pain when the boy flashed in front of his eyes. He thought this attack would be similar to the previous one; from left to right and vice versa; therefore, he

counterattacked by moving to the left; half defense, half counterattack. But again he was tricked.

Junbao was able to execute his stance well. Both his hands hit Yin's shoulder, chest and back. He moved nimbly, his hands fast; it was a pity his inner strength was still weak. Yin Kexi did not feel excessive pain, but he was frantically fending off the punches and dodging here and there.

Jueyuan watched his predicament and shouted, "Benevolent Master Yin, you are wrong! You must remember that there is no definite meaning of front and rear, left and right. Who lags behind will actually gain the initiative; and who initiates the attack will be under the opponent's power."

Yang Guo was impressed. "This Monk is right," he thought. "He happens to know very well the essence of martial arts. His words were very valuable. I originally thought he only let his disciple fight; but he also gives valuable instructions. Yin Kexi had achieved a high level of martial arts, but I doubt he would grasp this lesson even if he were given five more years to ponder it."

He was right; Yin Kexi did not realize the meaning behind Jueyuan's words. He thought the monk was just mocking him to disturb his concentration.

"Hey donkey head [derogatory name for monk], don't talk rubbish!" he snapped. "Oh, ouch ... ouch!"

He screamed in pain because his left thigh had been kicked by Zhang Junbao. He was enraged and lifted both his hands; he intended to attack at the top of his strength. He ignored Junbao's attack and all he wanted was to vent his anger.

Junbao was nervous to see his fierce countenance; his hair and whiskers stood up. Junbao called out. He was about to leap back when he heard his master say, "Junbao, our

strength against his! Quick, quick! Take rigidity from flexibility. Borrowing strength with 'Four Taels Against a Thousand Jin' [si liang bo qian jin]!"

Jueyuan was teaching the essence of Jiu Yang Zhen Jing; unfortunately it was too late. No matter how smart Junbao was, he could not grasp it in a short moment. Because of his anxiety, Junbao could not breathe. He could see Yin Kexi was really angry and was going to kill him.

At that critical moment he heard the swishing noise of a small stone flying toward Yin Kexi. The stone was really small, yet it made Yin Kexi clench his teeth and move a step backward. It was Yang Guo who helped Junbao. He had picked a couple of flowers, squeezed them in his hand and made a small flower ball. He then flicked the small stone with "Divine Flicking Finger" and immediately flicked the flower ball right after that.

Yin Kexi was trying to avoid the stone by moving backward, but the flower ball which came later hit his [da zhui xue] accupoint on his back accurately. The ball did not hit hard, but it left a flower juice mark on his clothes.

Junbao was saved from danger. He leaped to the west, but did not run away. On the contrary, he continued his attack with Yang Guo's "Who Killed the Deer".

Yin Kexi hesitated. He had experienced several punches from this youngster, "On the first move the left and right were interchangeable, the second move they were straight; I wonder what the third move will be?" Yang Guo was ingenious, he developed that move based on the old saying, 'qin shi qi lu, tian xia gong zhu zhi' [lit. Qin (Dynasty) lost its deer, everybody was chasing after it]; how could Yin anticipate the move?

No matter how hard Yin Kexi tried to keep up he got behind. Junbao moved fast, flashing to the left and right, and in no time he was behind Yin's back. At that time the moon was already high in the sky. Junbao could see the thumb-size flower juice mark. Without wasting any time he hit the mark. He thought, "Benevolent Master Yang is so good, without my being able to see it, he has given me the promised mark ..."

Yin Kexi did not move quickly enough, before he realized it his back had been hit by Junbao's finger. This [da zhui xue] is the meeting point of three arteries. He felt a sudden numbness and he collapsed to the ground.

Except for Xiaoxiang Zi, everybody cheered! They praised, "A very nice "Who Killed the Deer"."

"Excuse me!" Junbao said and searched his fallen opponent's body. Unfortunately he did not find the sutra book he was looking for. He turned his eyes to Xiaoxiang Zi.

Xiaoxiang Zi was not stupid. He understood the boy's intention. His skill level was almost the same as Yin Kexi's. Therefore, if Yin Kexi has fallen, he would not gain victory either. Without waiting he brushed his long robe and said, "I don't have the books you are looking for. Farewell!" He paid no attention to Yin Kexi and immediately leaped southward to escape.

Unexpectedly Jueyuan flicked his sleeve; his body flew past him blocking Xiaoxiang Zi's way. Xiaoxiang Zi was fast, Jueyuan was even faster. Without further ado Xiaoxiang Zi attacked the monk's chest. He exerted his whole energy toward his both hands.

"Watch out!" Yang Guo, Zhou Botong, Reverend Yideng and Guo Jing cried simultaneously. They knew the fierceness of this blow. While they were still shouting, a loud crash was

heard. The monk's chest was squarely hit by the 'book thief'. They groaned inwardly, "Damn!"

Even though his attack hit the monk's chest, Xiaoxiang Zi was the one who suffered from this blow. He flew away like a kite without a string; his body flew several meters and he fell to the ground, unconscious.

Jueyuan did not have any martial arts, but he has mastered the 'Nine Yang Manual'. His body could be controlled at will. He did not dodge Xiaoxiang Zi's attack, but his body reacted to external force naturally. A soft blow would produce a softer reaction, and a hard blow would produce an even harder reaction. Xiaoxiang Zi's blow was very forceful; therefore, the reaction force was also enormous. Xiaoxiang's strength bounced back and he injured himself severely.

The spectators were pleasantly surprised; they secretly praised this monk's profound internal energy. But Jueyuan was dumbfounded, he softly murmured, "Amitaba Buddha, Amitaba Buddha." Zhang Junbao immediately leaped over and searched his body. As with Yin Kexi, he did not find any books. He stood still in bewilderment.

"I overheard their conversation. I am sure they stole the books," Yang Guo said, "I wonder where they hid them."

"Let us torture them and force their confession," Wu Xiuwen proposed.

"Please, please ..." Jueyuan said, "don't ..."

"I believe they won't confess even if we chop one off their arms or legs," Huang Rong quipped. She knew very well these two's characters.

While everybody was at loss as to what to do next, they heard a monkey's cry from the western peak. They turned their head and saw the Divine Eagle chasing a dark green

ape. The ape was big, but it was no match for the Eagle. The ape frantically ran and shrieked incessantly.

“Brother Eagle, have mercy on the monkey, let him go,” Guo Xiang ran toward the Eagle.

The Eagle understood, it stopped and stood still.

Yin Kexi woke up and stood. He helped Xiaoxiang Zi to stand; then beckoned to the ape. The ape rushed to his side; it seemed like it had been tamed by them. They leaned against the ape and limping, walked away down the mountain. Yang Guo and the others felt pity and let them go.

Guo Xiang saw Junbao’s forehead was still bleeding; she took her handkerchief out and dressed the wound. Junbao was very grateful; he was about to open his mouth to express his gratitude when he saw tears welling up in Guo Xiang’s eyes. He did not know why the Miss was heartbroken.

At that moment he heard Yang Guo’s clear voice, “We had a great time gathering on this beautiful evening. We shall chat over a cup of wine when we meet again. Let us part here.” He waved his sleeve, held Xiao Longnu’s hand and walked down the mountain together with the Divine Eagle.

The moon was bright like it was day, a cool breeze stirred the leaves, the night birds chirped cheerfully but Guo Xiang could not hold back her tears and the tear drops fell to the ground.

So it is said:

“The autumn wind is clear and bright,
the fallen leaves clump together,
the birds go south for the winter.
When can they meet again;
that time is hard to decide.”

[The end of the entire book. The narration of Guo Xiang, Zhang Junbao, Jueyuan, the Nine Yang Manual, and others' accomplishment will be continued in the 'Heaven Sword and Dragon Saber'.]

THE END